

NOVEMBER 19, 1915

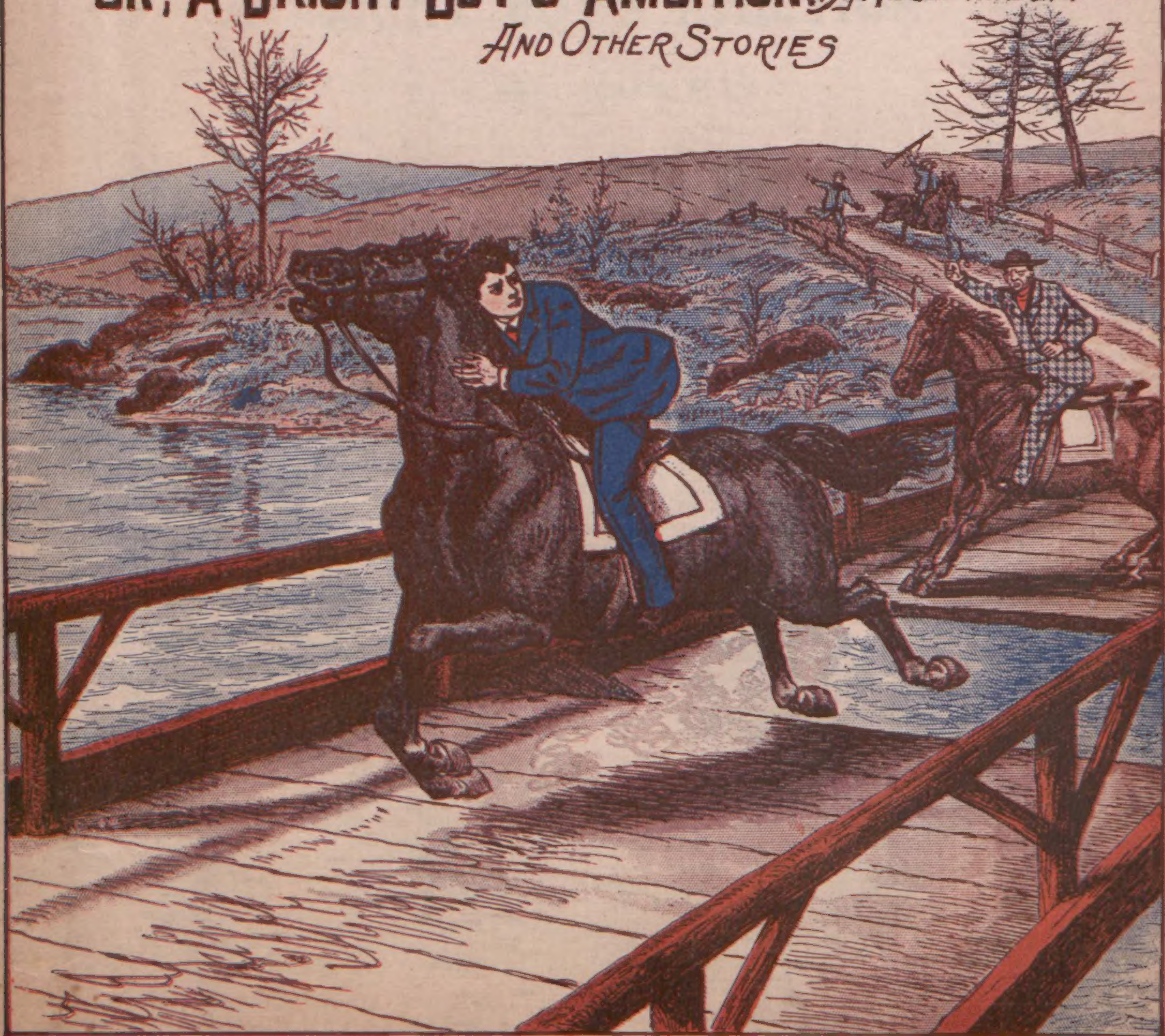
No 529

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FAME & FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS THAT MAKE MONEY.

A START IN LIFE ;
OR, A BRIGHT BOY'S AMBITION. *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*
AND OTHER STORIES



The animal, however, was equal to the emergency. She took a flying leap and landed him safely beyond the break. Mr. Squires, who had counted on overtaking the boy in another minute, reined in just in time to save himself.

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MS. 530

THE BOYS' LIFE

STORIES OF

BOYS THAT MAKE HISTORY

A START IN LIFE

OR, A BRIGHT BOY'S AMBITION

And Other Stories



Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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Price 5 Cents.

A START IN LIFE

— OR —

A BRIGHT BOY'S AMBITION

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO ORPHANS.

"Please don't; you hurt me!" expostulated pretty Kittie Clyde, trying to withdraw one of her plump, sunburned hands from the grasp of a sandy-featured, surly looking boy, named Abe Barker.

"Then give me a kiss and I'll let you go," grinned her tormentor.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," cried the girl indignantly.

"Why won't you?"

"Because I won't; so there!"

The girl looked defiant, the boy angry and aggressive.

"I guess I'll have to make you," he snarled, after a moment's pause.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Abe Barker."

"Why won't I?"

"You wouldn't dare," she cried, flushed and excited.

"I dare do as I please," he retorted jeeringly. "I've wanted for a long time to kiss you. This is the first decent chance I've had to do it. I've got you all by yourself. It won't do you any good to scream, for there ain't any one near to hear you. Come now, do the right thing and I'll stand treat when we reach the village."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to talk to me that way," cried the girl.

"Is that so?" said Abe sneeringly.

"Yes, it's so," she replied spunkily.

"Are you going to give me that kiss?"

"No, I'm not."

"I'll bet you will."

He began to twist her wrist in such a way that a cry of acute pain escaped her lips.

"Now will you——"

Spat!

The words he started to say expired with a gulp in his throat and he went down headlong into the dust of the road.

A third person had appeared with unexpected suddenness on the scene from among the trees that lined that part of the turnpike, and the newcomer's fist had shot out straight as an arrow from the bow and as swift, taking Abe Barker in the jaw with a force that dazed him.

"I hope he didn't hurt you much, Kittie," said the new arrival, in a cheery tone, that had a sympathetic ring to it.

"Oh, Fred!" she exclaimed, joyfully. "I'm so glad you came."

"I'm glad myself," he replied heartily. "I'm always happy to be of service to you."

She blushed to the roots of her hair and looked down at the ground.

As he took her hand unresistingly in his and began to rub her sprained wrist with a gentle, almost caressing touch, Abe Barker got to his feet.

"I'll get square with you for that, Fred Stone," he snarled, darkly, as he brushed the dust from his clothes.

"Will you?" retorted the other carelessly. "Now is as good as any time."

"You think you can sit on my neck 'cause you're a boxer; but I'll fix you. I will if I die for it," declared Barker, vengefully.

"I didn't give you any more than you deserve for annoying Kittie Clyde, and hurting her wrist. Nobody but a coward would use his strength on a girl."

"Bah! What right have you to butt in?"

"The right of every true American boy to defend the weak against imposition."

"You make me sick."

"Do I? Then let me tell you right here, I'll make you a good bit sicker if I hear of you interfering with Kittie Clyde again. Just make a note of that for future reference."

"Yah!" cried Abe Barker, with a baleful glare. "I'll get back at you for this, see if I don't."

"Well, if you do, let me know," replied the sturdy boy, contemptuously.

"You'll know it all right. I hate you, Fred Stone, and I sha'n't rest till I get square with you."

"Kittie, may I have the pleasure of seeing you to the village?" asked Fred, paying no further attention to Barker.

"I shall be very glad to have you do so," she replied, with a smile.

"Then I think we'll start ahead," he said.

They moved off in the direction of Dover village, leaving Abe Barker to grit his teeth and shake his fist after the youth who had handled him without gloves.

Fred Stone was a stalwart, good-looking boy of seventeen, who had all the elements of a hustler and stayer born in him.

He was an orphan, and had been "raised" by Peter Grice, the village storekeeper and postmaster.

Most of the villagers remembered the circumstances under which the boy became a member of the Grice household.

His mother had been taken suddenly ill on the coach which twelve years before the opening of our story ran between the town of Wellington, on the Blue Line Railroad, and Belfast, a large village twelve miles or so to the north.

She was left at the Dover inn, then kept by Mr. Grice and his wife, and during the night she died.

Next day Mr. Grice announced that in the charity of his heart he and Mrs. Grice had decided to take charge of the little orphan instead of sending him to the poor farm.

People wondered, for such a magnanimous act was not in accordance with Mr. Grice's character.

Shortly afterward Mr. Grice gave up the inn, which had never paid, and bought out the village store, which carried with it the postmastership.

It was a matter of some gossip at the time where he got the money to do this.

As young Fred grew up his protector made him as useful as possible about the store, and the boy, as soon as he understood he had no claim on Mr. Grice, endeavored to do his duty as best he knew how.

He never could find out anything about his parentage, as the postmaster claimed to be ignorant on the subject himself.

Kittie Clyde was the orphan niece of the village dressmaker. She and Fred were the best of friends, and saw a good deal of each other.

Abe Barker was the son of Squire Amos Barker, a lawyer and justice of the peace of Dover.

He was not a popular youth in the village, as he had the habit of browbeating and imposing on those younger and weaker than himself.

These tactics didn't work with Fred Stone, whom Abe looked down on as a charity boy, and they had had many mix-ups in consequence, in which Abe came off second best.

As a consequence young Barker hated Fred, and was on the lookout for a suitable opportunity to do him up.

This feeling was increased by the knowledge that Fred had the inside track with Kittie, on whom Abe was badly smitten.

"Well, Kittie," said Fred, after they had walked a little way, "I'm thinking of leaving Dover."

"Leaving Dover!" she exclaimed, in a mingled tone of surprise and regret.

"Yes. Mr. Grice and I haven't hitched well of late. He's continually finding fault with me, and I'm tired of it."

The girl made no reply, but her manner showed that she was somewhat upset by his words.

"Will you feel sorry when I go, Kittie?" he asked in a low tone, looking wistfully into her averted face.

"Sorry! Oh, Fred, you know I will," she cried impulsively with quivering lips. "Must you really go?"

"Kittie, it's high time I was doing something for myself in the world," he said earnestly. "I am seventeen, and what do I amount to at this moment? A store boy at a dollar a week and my board. I am simply wasting my time working for Mr. Grice, who does not seem to appreciate my services. The world is wide and the opportunities many for a boy of energy and ambition. I am anxious to make a start in life."

"I hate to have you leave Dover," she replied; "but still I think you are right. There are no prospects in this village for a bright boy like you."

"Thank you, Kittie, for the compliment," he said, in a pleased tone. "You have always been a good friend to me—in fact the only true friend I ever had. I want you to understand that I appreciate your friendship—that I shall never forget you as long as I live."

"Don't be rash, Fred," she said, with a sad little smile, laying her hand on his arm. "The world is indeed wide, as you just said, and in new scenes and among fresh faces you may forget that such a person as Kittie Clyde lives in the quiet little village of Dover, far away maybe from your field of action."

"Don't you believe that, Kittie," replied the boy, taking her hand unresistingly in his. "I am not built that way. I am going to write to you regularly, and I shall want you to answer my letters and tell me all the news, for this village will never cease to have an interest for me, since it is the only home I have known. You will do that, won't you?"

"Yes, if you really wish me to," she answered faintly.

"Of course I wish you to."

"When are you thinking of going?"

"I haven't decided, but I feel sure it will be soon."

"And where do you think you will go? To some city?"

"I have an idea of going to Chicago."

"That is a big place. It will be quite a change for you from Dover."

"I should say it will. I hope after I am gone you will not be annoyed by Abe Barker; but I'm afraid he will pester you when he knows you have not me at hand to protect you."

"I am not afraid of Abe Barker," she replied with some spirit.

"I know you're not, Kittie; but he is mean enough to make things very unpleasant for you."

"I shall have nothing to do with him after this."

"That will be the better way. Still he will be sure to butt in himself, for I guess he's sweet on you."

"Sweet on me!" she exclaimed, scornfully. "I hate him." Fred laughed.

"He had nerve enough to try and make you kiss him."

"I wouldn't kiss him if he was the last boy on earth," she said, with an indignant toss of her pretty head.

"Well, he isn't the last boy on earth by a large majority," said Fred.

"I wish he was going to leave the village instead of you."

"He's not anxious to get out and hustle, I guess, as long as he has a father to support him."

"He seems to think he is a person of great importance because his father is a lawyer and a justice of the peace."

"That's right; but I don't see that it does him any good to think so. None of the boys take their hats off to him. In fact, I am sure he is the most unpopular boy in the village."

"While you are just the reverse," she said with a smile.

"No bouquets, Kittie."

"I'm not saying any more than the truth. Everybody likes you and speaks well of you."

"That is pleasant to know. However, I'd be perfectly satisfied if only you liked me."

Kittie blushed and looked down.

"Well, here we are at your gate. Good-by until I see you again," he said.

"Good-by, Fred," and she ran into the house, leaving the boy to continue on to Mr. Grice's store.

CHAPTER II.

MR. GRICE HEARS ASTONISHING NEWS.

Night had fallen over Dover village, Fred was eating his supper alone in the kitchen at the back of the house, while Mr. Grice was sorting the mail left by the Belfast messenger, when a wagon, loaded with the paraphernalia of a traveling tinker, drove up to the door.

The driver dismounted and entered the store.

He was a square-built, hearty-looking chap, with a black beard and deeply bronzed features.

There was something about him that smacked of the sea.

Evidently he had been a sailor at some period of his career. Mr. Grice looked up and eyed him askance.

"Well, my friend, what do you want?" he asked in the inhospitable tone he used to all strangers.

"This is the general store and post-office, I guess?" said the new arrival.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" replied Mr. Grice.

"You ain't got no objection to sellin' me a small bag of crackers and a hunk of cheese, have you?" said the stranger.

"Not in the least. About how much do you want?"

The customer stated the quantity he wanted.

"Have you any first-rate cider, too?" he added.

"Plenty of it, my friend. Have you a jug or anything to take it away in?"

"I've a jug in the wagon," he replied, making for the door.

By the time he returned Mr. Grice had the cheese and crackers done up.

"You might have saved yourself that trouble, provided you ain't got no objection to my eatin' my supper in the store."

"This isn't a restaurant," answered the postmaster in an ungracious tone.

"That's right, it ain't," replied the customer, coolly; "but as things ain't comin' my way very fast I can't afford a restaurant. Besides, I thought I'd kill two birds with one stone. I've got a question or two to ask you and it would save time to do it while I was eatin'."

"Well," said Mr. Grice, as he took up the stone jug, "as the store is empty you can eat here if you want to, but it isn't the usual thing."

"Thank ye," replied the stranger. "I'd take it kindly if you'd loan me a mug to drink the cider out of."

Mr. Grice grudgingly obliged him.

"Thank ye ag'in. What is the damage?"

The postmaster mentioned the amount and the stranger paid it in small coins.

At that moment Squire Barker walked into the store.

"Any mail for me this evening, Mr. Grice?" he inquired.

The stranger, who was munching his cheese and crackers at the counter near by, gave a start as he heard the name and stopped eating.

"There's a paper and a letter for you, Squire," replied the postmaster, with some obsequiousness in his tone, hastening to hand them over to the lawyer.

Amos Barker purchased a package of smoking tobacco and then left the store.

"Beggin' your pardon, mister storekeeper—a—a—that gent called you Grice, if I ain't mistaken?" said the stranger, somewhat anxiously.

"Well, there's nothing very wonderful in being called by one's right name, is there?" snorted the postmaster.

"Might I venture to ask what your front name is?" asked the stranger, with increasing eagerness.

"If you'd taken the trouble to look at the sign over the door when you came in it would have saved you the trouble of asking that question," replied Mr. Grice, not over pleasantly.

"I wasn't thinkin' about the name then. Besides, it's dark outside and—"

"My name is Peter Grice," interrupted the postmaster.

Peter Grice," repeated the stranger, regarding the storekeeper fixedly. "It ain't possible, is it, that you're the half-brother of my old cap'n, Benjamin Sands, of the 'Matchless Margaret'?"

"What! Did you know my brother, the captain?" asked Mr. Grice, clearly taken by surprise.

"Did I know him!" exclaimed the stranger, with some emotion. "Why, bless your heart, didn't he take me aboard his ship and provide for me when I was starvin' in the streets of New York? Didn't he save me from bein' cut in two by the jaws of a voracious shark?" with a reminiscent shudder. "Let me tell you that's the sort of obligation Jack Barnstable doesn't easily forget—"

"Then your name is Jack Barnstable, eh? And you're a sailor?"

"Right ye are, Mister Grice. Well, this is a strange coincidence to find myself face to face with my dear old cap'n's half-brother. Tip us your flipper," and Jack held out his rough and horny hand in a friendly way.

Mr. Grice took it somewhat gingerly, as if he was afraid it might bite him.

"So you knew Ben, did you?" the postmaster said, without any great degree of interest. "I suppose he's sailing about—far, far away?"

"Yes," nodded Barnstable, mournfully, "very far, far away."

"So much the better," thought the storekeeper, as he carelessly played with one of the weights of the counter scales. "I'm always afraid of his coming back, very hard up, and wanting to borrow money of me." Then looking hard at the sailor as he said aloud: "He isn't likely to come back to the States for a long time, eh?"

"Not for a very long time," answered Barnstable, raising the mug of cider to his lips and taking a deep draught.

"Glad to hear it," muttered Mr. Grice to himself. "Money saved is money earned."

"He won't be home never no more," continued the sailor mournfully, as he put the mug down empty. "He's dead!"

"Dead!" replied Mr. Grice, not appearing to be greatly shocked at the news. "Is my brother really dead?"

"There ain't no doubt about it. I seen him breathe his last."

"Dear me! So poor Ben is really dead? Well, well. I haven't seen him these fifteen years, but I was always expecting to have him hunt me up. Died very poor, I suppose? Rolling stones don't gather much moss—"

"Well, he wasn't so badly off for moss," answered Barnstable, significantly. "He left \$100,000."

"What!" gasped Mr. Grice, staring at the sailor as if he couldn't believe his ears. "My brother left \$100,000! Preposterous!"

"It does seem a lot of money, doesn't it?" said Barnstable, taking up another cracker and a piece of cheese. "But it ain't preposterous, as you call it, for I seen the evidence myself."

"You did!" cried Mr. Grice, beginning to take a strong interest in the conversation at last. "You saw the money?"

"I didn't say I seen the money."

"Maybe you saw his bankbook," said the postmaster, eagerly.

"No, I didn't see no bankbook."

"Then what did you see?" asked the storekeeper, impatiently.

"I seen a lot of docyments—bonds he called 'em—which was worth \$100,000."

"One hundred thousand dollars worth of bonds, eh? Why, where did Ben get them?"

"Bought 'em."

"But where did he get the money to buy them?" persisted Mr. Grice with unfeigned eagerness.

"Well, you see, while the 'Matchless Margaret' was waitin' for a cargo at Very Cruz, that's in Mexico, the cap'n took a run up into the Sierra Madre mountains to visit some old senior he know'd."

"Well," cried the postmaster, impatiently, as Barnstable paused to fill his mouth with bread and chaase.

"One mornin' when he was out taking a constitootional in the range he lost his way, and while tryin' to find his way out of the blamed old place he fell—"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Mr. Grice, eagerly, as Barnstable stopped to fill and drink a mug of cider. "He fell—"

"Into a hole."

"Pre-cisely. He fell into a hole, and the hole turned out to be the entrance to a lost silver mine of untold wealth."

"Gracious! Untold wealth, did you say?"

"That's what I said. My cap'n he wa'n't no fool. He jest took the bearin's of that there mine, and when he reached the senior's hacienda he told the old don what he'd diskivered."

"Well, well; what then?"

"The upshot was he sold his diskivery for \$100,000 in gold."

"In gold!"

"Pre-cisely. That is, he got a docymment which said that a certain bank in New York was to pay that amount in the yellow stuff."

"And he got it, did he?"

"Sure he got it, and slapped it right into a new issue of government bonds which somebody reckymended him to do."

"And then what did he do?"

"He was just about to start off for this here State—"

"To see me, of course. Dear old Ben, I wonder how he got track of me. Too bad he didn't live, for I should have welcomed him with open arms."

"As I was saying, he was just about to start for this here State when he fell ill, took to his bunk, and gradually got worse and worse—"

"But he left a will, eh?" interrupted Mr. Grice, with anxious eagerness. "I'm his heir, you know."

"You!" responded Barnstable coolly. "And what's to become of his son?"

"His what?" almost shrieked the postmaster.

"His son. His male offspring."

Mr. Grice gasped and gurgled until the sailor thought he was going to faint.

To revive him he threw half a mug full of cider in his face.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAITHFUL SAILOR.

It was no shock whatever to Mr. Grice to learn that his half-brother was dead, for he never had any particular affection for him; but it was a big surprise to learn that Captain Benjamin Sands, who had always been a poor man, had unexpectedly grown wealthy at the close of his life.

It was a shock, however, for him to learn that a serious obstacle stood in the way of his inheriting that \$100,000 worth of bonds, which he had been calculating upon as almost his own from the moment he became satisfied that the sailor's statement of his half-brother's wealth was true.

"A son!" he roared as soon as he recovered his breath, and without noticing the little rills of cider that ran down his cheeks. "I never heard of his marrying. He must have taken that idiotic step abroad."

"No, he didn't," answered Barnstable, regarding the storekeeper's remark in some surprise. "He took that idiotic step, as you call it, at home. It was what they call a match on the sly. He never told anybody about it except me, and that wasn't till his last illness."

"A secret marriage, eh? Hum!"

Mr. Grice was a rapid thinker, and the possibility struck him that some advantage might come to him out of that fact.

"I'll tell you how it was," went on the sailor, finishing his cheese and crackers and refilling the mug from the cider jug. "By the way, Mister Grice, you haven't such a thing as an old pipe and some 'backy, have ye? I left mine in the waggin outside, and it's rather a trouble to go and get it."

So eager was the storekeeper to hear the story that he saw was coming that he was guilty of a remarkable piece of extravagance—he took a brand-new briar-root pipe out of a box, and a package of smoking tobacco from a shelf, and pushed the articles toward his visitor.

"Thank ye kindly," said Jack Barnstable, proceeding to fill and light the pipe.

"You were about to tell me how my brother, the captain, got married," said the postmaster eagerly.

"So I was. One night as my poor cap'n was lyin' ill in his

bunk he says to me, 'Jack,' says he, in a mournful tone, 'it strikes me that my time ain't far off—there's somethin' on my mind, Jack, that is chokin' me, and I can't keep it aboard no longer. When I'm gone,' says he, 'make for Indiany, seek out my poor wife—' 'Wife, cap'n?' says I, 'why, I didn't know you had got a wife.' 'Jack,' says he, shakin' his head sorrowful-like, 'years ago I married a village gal under a false name, the name of Stone—' "

"What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Grice. "Did you say Stone?"

"That's what I did," replied Barnstable, sucking his pipe and regarding the storekeeper out of the corner of his eye.

"It's very singular," ejaculated Mr. Grice reflectively, "but—"

"What's very singular?" asked the sailor.

"Nothing. Go on."

"A year afterward," says my old cap'n, 'I took to sea ag'in, and deserted her and her child. Of late years, Jack, I've tried hard—hard—Jack,' and the tears rolled down his weather-beaten cheeks as he spoke, 'to find 'em out, but all in vain. My wife had left her native village and gone to relatives she had somewhere out in Indiany. Just what place in the State she went to I couldn't find out. But since I got rich, Jack, I meant to go and search the State from end to end till I found my wife and son. Heaven, however, has seen fit to prevent me doin' the right thing by 'em, as a punishment I suppose for my sin.' "

Barnstable paused to wet his throat with a drink of cider.

"Maybe she's dead, cap'n," says I. 'Maybe,' says he, 'maybe,' and the tones of his voice showed very clear that what we call fun in our young days is a rare rod in pickle for us in our old ones. 'But my son,' says he, 'my son Fred—' "

"What! Was the boy's name Fred?" asked Mr. Grice, with starting eye. "Not Fred Stone?"

"The very name," replied the sailor, nodding and blowing out a cloud of smoke. "What's the matter? Do you know such a boy hereabouts?" added Barnstable eagerly.

"No, no; how should I?" mumbled Mr. Grice, while beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead.

"I thought maybe you did," replied the sailor in a disappointed tone. "As I was saying, the cap'n says, says he, 'Find my son out, promise me you will, Jack! I remember givin' the child a little gold medallion—his mother tied it to a bit of navy-blue ribbon, and fastened it around his neck, sayin' he should wear it in memory of his father. Find him, Jack,' says he, 'find him. On him, on my child, I have settled all the world, was dead.' "

"And didn't my brother mention me in his will at all?" asked Mr. Grice anxiously.

The sailor shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I guess he must have forgot all about ye," he said.

"That's gratitude, I must say," answered the storekeeper, with a look of disgust.

"Jack," says my old cap'n, and his voice sank lower and lower every minute, 'Jack,' says he, 'I've left all them bonds with the Universal Trust Co., on Broadway, together with my last will and testament—' "

"The Universal Trust Co., Broadway, New York?"

Barnstable nodded solemnly.

"There's a wallet, Jack," says my old cap'n in a faint voice, 'beneath this mattress in which there's money enough to pay the expenses of your search. Swear, Jack,' says he; 'swear to obey the last wishes of your poor old cap'n.' Well, Mister Grice, I knelt by the bunk and swore to leave no stone unturned till I had found the cap'n's boy. 'Bless you, Jack,' says he, 'bless you. After I'm buried take the first train for Indiany and—' The poor old cap'n's voice sank, he looked at me with a wild stare, and fell back on his pillow—never to rise again. My old cap'n, the only friend I had in all the world—was dead."

Jack Barnstable wiped the moisture from his eyes and smoked on in silence.

"Poor Ben," said Mr. Grice, throwing a wary eye toward the rear of the store, lest Fred Stone should put in an inopportune appearance.

He need not have been afraid of that, however, as the lad had some time since gone off by the back door to visit his chum Sam Hawley.

"I'm afraid I shall find this faithful individual very much in the way," mused the postmaster. "If he should make inquiries about the village, as I suppose he will, he's bound to find out that a boy by the name of Fred Stone lives with me, and then all chance I might have of eventually coming into that \$100,000 would be scattered to the four winds of heaven."

"Well, Mister Grice," continued the sailor, in a more cheerful tone, "as ill luck would have it I was robbed of nearly

all my money before I left New York. Some landshark collared it. I only had enough to pay my fare to Indianapolis, and to buy that horse and waggin, and that there tinker's outfit I have at the door. Now what would you have done in such a position?"

"I'd have given the search up as a bad job," replied the storekeeper.

"That's what you'd have done, maybe, but when Jack Barnstable swears to do a thing he sticks to it till it is done."

"Do you really intend to persevere in this wild goose chase?"

"Yes, Mister Grice, and I mean to go until I find my poor cap'n's son. I devote one-half of my time to tinkerin', to pay my travelin' expenses, and the other half to minute investigation. I make it a p'int to inquire at all the post-offices and stores, and every house where I stop to do a little business in the tinkerin' line. Up to the present nobody ain't even so much as heard the name of Fred Stone."

"It isn't worth your while to make any investigations in this village. I have lived here fifteen years, and I know every man, woman and child in the place," said the storekeeper, anxious to start the sailor on his way out of Dover.

"I guess you ought to know 'em," replied Barnstable, putting the new pipe in an absent kind of way in his pocket, and following it with the package of tobacco. "Then I'll be gettin' on to the next town. I ain't got no time to lose, 'cause there's a crocodile to the will."

"A crocodile!" exclaimed Mr. Grice, in a tone of perplexity. "Oh, you mean a codicil, don't you?" he added eagerly.

"I suppose that's what it is," admitted the sailor.

"Well, what does the codicil say?" asked the storekeeper, more eager than ever.

"It says if the boy isn't found in two years, the property in the trust company should go to—"

"Yes, yes," ejaculated Mr. Grice, in a fever of anxious impatience.

"Somebody else."

"To whom? To whom?"

"That's just what I never rightly knew."

Mr. Grice nearly choked again, and Barnstable seized the partially drained mug, intending to give him another dose if necessary.

"This sailor will drive me out of my mind," thought the postmaster. "It must be myself the codicil affects—his son first, his half-brother next, of course. I'll write to the Universal Trust Company, in New York, and find out all the particulars. Yes, that's what I'll do. Now I must send this fellow on his way before Fred turns up. He might see some resemblance in the boy's face to his dear old captain, and ask him questions that would make it awkward for me to explain afterward."

"Well, I must be goin', Mr. Grice," said Barnstable.

"Yes, yes; that's right. Here's a five-dollar bill to help you on your way, my good friend. Now don't lose a moment, but go right on to Prescott."

"Thank ye kindly, Mister Grice. You're a gent of the right sort. When I find the cap'n's boy I'll bring him back this way and interjuce him to ye."

"Do so by all means," said the storekeeper. "I shall be delighted to meet my little nephew."

"Little!" replied the sailor. "He must be all of seventeen years now."

"Is it possible! How time flies!"

"Well, good-by, Mister Grice. It isn't an easy cruise that lies before me. If ever I return at all, I'll bring with me my old cap'n's son."

CHAPTER IV.

FRED AND HIS FRIEND SAM.

"So you're going to shake the village and Mr. Grice and start out for yourself, are you?" said Sam Hawley, Fred's particular friend, to Fred, when the latter told him what course he had determined on.

"Yes," replied Fred, "that's what I'm going to do. It's time I made a start in life."

This conversation took place on the back stoop of the Hawley home, at the same time that Jack Barnstable, the sailor, was holding his interview with Mr. Peter Grice in the store.

"Where do you expect to go?" asked Sam, interestedly.

"Chicago."

"And what do you expect to do when you get there?"

"I haven't the least idea yet."

"Look here, Fred, why don't you take to railroading?"

"Railroading?"

"Yes. There's a good chance for you on the new line."

"You mean the Round Top? The road on which you're working?"

"Sure. I've just been promoted to fire a hump-back in the yards at Prescott. Some day I'll get a regular run on a freight. Then I'll work my way to a passenger, and one of these days I'll be a full-fledged engineer. That's the height of my ambition," said Sam, enthusiastically.

"I don't know but I rather like the idea, Sam. It might be better than going off a long distance—to Chicago, for instance, where I might have some trouble getting a decent kind of a job."

"Of course it would be better, for you could see your friends once a week at any rate. That ought to be a big inducement, for I know you're soft on Kittie Clyde, and she thinks a heap of you."

"Oh, go on!" replied Fred, in some confusion.

Sam laughed.

"Besides, you and I would see more of each other than we do now. I'd hate to have you go way off to Chicago. I might never see you again. Better think the matter over. If you'd like to work up to the post of an engineer some day, now is the time to begin, and the Round Top is the road you want to start in on. The management will treat you white. I ought to know, for I've been a wiper and machinist's assistant for six months, and I have now got my first boost upward."

"Where will I make application for a job?"

"Do you want to learn to run an engine like myself?" asked Sam.

"Any branch of active service will suit me, but I guess I'd like to be an engineer first rate," said Fred, with sparkling eyes. "There's something fascinating after all in the whir of the wheels, the hiss of the steam, the shriek of the whistle and the clanging of the bell. Yes, on the whole, I guess I should prefer to be an engineer."

"Good! I thought you would," replied Sam, with a grin of satisfaction. "Well, you want to see the foreman of the round-house at Prescott. He'll put you at work right away, for I happen to know they're short-handed. He'll set you to wiping off engines when they come in after a run, and to helping the machinists make repairs. It is a dirty, hard job, but you'll learn all the different plans of a locomotive in a short time if you keep your eyes open, and you're just the boy to do that."

"Yes. I don't think much escapes me when I get down to business," nodded Fred.

"You're a fellow that's bound to make yourself popular, and when promotion comes your way, if you get a lift ahead of others who have been longer on the line, there won't be much of a kick coming."

"I shouldn't like to climb over another person's head to get a job."

"Pooh! It's the best man who wins out always. If you show the right spirit, and demonstrate your ability right from the start, you're bound to go ahead of the slack ones. That's the way of the world, and the right way, too. The earth can't stop for the lazy and the incompetent, and nowhere in the world is worth and energy more appreciated and rewarded than upon a railroad. The men who run the road always have an eye out for the best, and they're going to have it, don't you forget it."

"Do you think my general knowledge of telegraphy would help me any, Sam?"

"It might come in handy some day. You never can tell when the occasion might come up that your ability to tap a wire along the line and send a message to the nearest operator might help you out of a big hole. One of these days when you get promoted to your first run it would be a good idea for you to learn the calls all along the line."

"Mr. Grice is bound to kick when I tell him that I'm going to leave," said Fred.

"Ho! What do you care for Mr. Grice? I guess you aren't under any great obligations to him. He's made you work for your keep ever since you could reach a shelf in the store."

"That's right, he has. He only gives me a dollar a week spending money now, and it's like pulling teeth to get him to give that up. I'm tired of being his slave."

"I should think you would be. Let him kick and be jiggered. You've got a few dollars saved, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, all you'll need is enough to keep you at Prescott until your first pay-day comes around. In fact, you can room with me. I'd like to have you. What do you say?"

"That would suit me all right, of course."

"I think it would. Shall I tell the foreman of the round-

house in the morning that you'll report for work some time during the day?"

"Yes."

"All right. You'll find Brackett will treat you squarely as long as you do your duty. He always keeps a sharp eye on a newcomer, especially to see what's in him. If he finds you're a hustler and anxious to make your way ahead he'll cotton to you, though you'll never know it. Some fine morning there'll be a vacancy to fire on a switch engine, and then Brackett will pick out the most likely chap to fill the bill. It might only be for a day, you know, but it will be a starter in the right direction. I've been on a switch engine a dozen times before I got my present steady sit, which begins to-morrow. I kept my eyes open and learned the knack of spreading the coal in the furnace to the best advantage. You do the same at the first chance you get, and if you make good you'll soon leave the wiping business to those with less gumption. It's the wide-awake chap that gets ahead in the world, and don't you forget it."

"I'm sure of that, Sam, and you'll find I'll get there with both feet."

"I'll bet you will, old man, for you're a pusher from Pusherville, or I don't know what that article is. I wouldn't want to bet on a surer thing than that you will go to the front like a knife through a roll of butter."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"You're welcome, for you deserve it all right."

"Well, I guess I'll have to be getting back to the store. It's pretty near closing time, and there is a lot of stuff that has to be carted inside before I can put the shutters up."

"So long, then. I hope to see you in Prescott to-morrow some time."

The boys shook hands, and Fred started down the street for the store.

He had only gone a short distance before a horse and wagon hove into view.

The rig was driven by the faithful sailor, Jack Barnstable.

He gave a casual glance at the boy who plodded by in the darkness.

Ah! If he only had known that the object of his arduous pilgrimage through the big State of Indiana was so close at hand—so close that had he reached out his long-handled whip he could have touched the boy—he would not have continued on his lonesome way to Prescott that night.

But he didn't know it, and so the sailor and the cap'n's son met and passed each other that evening, and neither was wiser of the fact.

CHAPTER V.

MR. GRICE TAKES WATER.

Fred rose at his customary hour, opened the store, put the usual display of boxes and barrels on the veranda around the door and, after waiting on several customers, went into the kitchen to get his breakfast, which the housekeeper, Mrs. Burns, had ready for him.

After eating his not over-bountiful repast, for the storekeeper maintained a miserly table, he returned to the store, ready for business again.

This meant that after unpacking several cases of goods, that had just been delivered from Wellington, he was expected to make his rounds through the village for orders to be delivered that afternoon.

He unpacked the cases and put the articles on the shelves where they belonged.

People came and went while he was doing this, and when more than one was to be waited on for anything save mail matter, he had to stop and attend to them.

It was time for him to go and harness up the rig in which he made his round of the regular customers before Mr. Grice was at liberty himself.

When Fred saw him take up the Wellington morning paper he went up to him and said:

"I suppose you have no objection to my going to Prescott this afternoon, have you, sir?"

This was rather a nervy request for Fred to make under the circumstances that bound him to the interests of Peter Grice, and the postmaster stared at the boy as if he thought his assistant had lost his senses.

"What's that?" he roared at last. "You want to go to Prescott this afternoon, eh? And you think I have no objection to letting you go? Well, I like your impudence. What business can you have in Prescott?"

"I'm going to ask for employment on the railroad," replied Fred, coolly.

"What!" shrieked Mr. Grice, and it looked as if he was going to have another of his choking spells.

Fred waited patiently for him to recover.

"What do you mean, you young rascal?" cried the postmaster, shaking his finger at him. "Going to ask for employment on the railroad when you're working for me."

"I mean just what I say, sir," replied the boy firmly, but respectfully. "I am going to leave the store."

"Oh, you are, eh?" replied Mr. Grice, sarcastically.

"Yes, sir."

"Perhaps it hasn't occurred to you that I might object to your leaving me?" said the storekeeper in a suppressed tone.

"I presumed you would object, sir; but having decided to make a start in life, as I am now seventeen years old, and as I have worked faithfully for you ever since I can remember, I judged you could offer no very strong reason why I should not try to better myself."

"To better yourself? Oh, indeed! Is that all you have to say?"

"That's all, sir."

"Now listen to me, you young villain. Don't you dare attempt to leave my employment until I get good and ready to let you go. Do you hear?" cried Mr. Grice, wrathfully.

"I hear you, sir," replied Fred, calmly. "Do you mind telling me when that time will be?"

The postmaster looked aghast at the boy's coolness.

"It's none of your business when it will be," he snarled. "Go out to the bar, hitch the team and start on your round, do you hear?"

"All right, sir. How about my going to Prescott?"

"You can't go."

"I'll only be gone until dark."

"I tell you that you can't go," roared Mr. Grice, furiously.

"It's a matter of great importance to me."

"I don't care how important it is."

"I don't think you have any right to stop me from going."

Mr. Grice seized a package of oatmeal from the shelf behind him and threw it at Fred as hard as he could.

The boy dodged and the package hurtled toward the door, where it struck Abe Barker, who was entering at the moment, full in the face.

The package burst open and deluged the new-comer from head to foot in meal.

Abe uttered a roar of surprise and pain, while the storekeeper looked horrified at the unexpected result he had brought about.

He was accustomed to treat the son of the Squire with the greatest respect, because Amos Barker was his best customer.

In some trepidation he hastened to square himself with the boy, while Fred took advantage of the situation to retire as gracefully as possible from the scene.

He harnessed the horse to the shaky wagon and started on his regular morning trip around the village.

It was eleven o'clock when he got back to the store, and found Mr. Grice waiting on a number of customers.

He put up the horse and then helped attend on the people who were waiting.

After that he filled the orders he had brought back with him. Mr. Grice said nothing to him, but favored him with a mighty black look.

At half-past twelve Fred got his dinner.

Then he went up to his room and changed his clothes.

He had made up his mind to go to Prescott whether Mr. Grice objected or not.

The look of quiet determination that rested on his features when he re-entered the store showed that he was prepared to take the bull by the horns at whatever cost.

He walked up to Mr. Grice, who was seated behind the letter boxes, and said:

"I am going to Prescott, sir."

The postmaster jumped off his stool as though stung by some venomous insect, and reached over to grab his assistant.

His face was as black as a thundergust, and his eyes flashed vengefully.

Fred drew back just out of his reach and then stood his ground.

He was half a head taller than Mr. Grice, and twice as well built, and any one would have said that the storekeeper wouldn't have a ghost of a show in a set-to with him.

For the first time in his life Mr. Grice began to realize that his power over the boy was slipping away from him.

He saw something in Fred's eyes that warned him that the lad did not propose to be handled without gloves any longer.

His angry eyes ran up and down the boy's stalwart person, and noted the intrepid flash of his hazel eyes.

The inspection satisfied him that he had reached his limit and that bulldozing would no longer prevail.

So he adopted different tactics.

"So you're going to Prescott, and without my permission, are you?"

"That's about the size of it, Mr. Grice. I'd rather you would give me permission, but if you won't——"

"You can go," replied the postmaster in a surly tone.

"Thank you, sir. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"See that you do," replied Mr. Grice, resuming his stool in a very bad humor, indeed.

"Is there anything I can do for you in Prescott?" asked Fred pleasantly.

"No, there isn't."

Just then Kittie Clyde entered the store.

"What can I do for you, Kittie?" asked Fred, eagerly.

"I want half a dozen spools of Clark's thread, Nos. 50, 60 and 70."

"All right, Kittie," and Fred got the thread out. "Anything else?"

"I want nine yards of Percaline lining."

Fred measured it out.

"What else?"

"That's all. Are you going anywhere, Fred? You're dressed up."

"I'm going to Prescott."

"Oh!"

"I'm going to try and get a job on the Round Top Railroad."

"Do you really mean that, Fred?" she asked in surprise.

"I do. I concluded that Chicago was too far away from you," he grinned.

"Aren't you a tease!" she exclaimed with a blush and coquettish glance into his eyes. You know you don't mean that."

"I do mean it, Kittie. I wouldn't miss seeing you once in a while for a farm."

There was a tender ring in his voice that told the girl he was telling nothing but the truth, and her warm little heart began to go pit-a-pat in her bosom.

It is a fact she thought a good deal of Fred Stone—more in fact than she even would admit to herself.

She looked down at the floor while her cheeks burned like twin red roses.

"There's your bundle, Kittie. If you'll wait till I charge the goods up to your aunt I will walk down the street with you."

Kittie waited, and in a few minutes she and Fred walked out of the store together.

CHAPTER VI.

A DIABOLICAL SCHEME.

Fred left Kittie at her aunt's home and continued on his way to Prescott.

He had a good eight-mile walk ahead of him, but that was a mere bagatelle to an active, sturdy-limbed lad like him.

He confidently expected to reach his destination within a couple of hours, and the chances were he would do so.

He soon left the village behind and then his way led him along the county road.

It was a pleasant afternoon, with a light breeze blowing, and the tramp was exhilarating to the boy.

Fred had walked a couple of miles when he grew thirsty.

He remembered there was a spring of cool water at a certain spot close by the road.

It was shaded by a thick clump of bushes.

At this point the fence was missing for a space of a dozen feet.

Fred skirted the bushes and sinking down on his hands and knees drank his fill.

As he raised his head he caught the thud of several horses coming down the road at a lively clip.

He thought nothing of the matter until the riders reined in directly opposite the break in the fence, dismounted, and after tying their animals to a convenient tree, walked over to the clump of bushes behind which the boy was still kneeling at the spring, and sat down on a log.

"I'm afraid this is a risky piece of business, Gibson," Fred heard a voice say. "Right in the open daylight, too."

"What's the matter?" asked Gibson, with an unpleasant laugh. "Are you getting an attack of the rattles at the last moment, Morgan?"

"I hope not; but I think this matter ought to be deferred till night. I don't see that it makes much difference what train is shunted into the river so long as one of them finds its way there."

"Don't you?" replied the third man, in a calm, steely tone. "Well, it makes all the difference in the world."

"I suppose it does, then, if you say so, Mr. Squires," said Morgan, in a respectful way.

"The train that I wish to get is the express that passes Prescott at 1:35. President Whitney, of the Round Top, the most dangerous man to the interests of the Blue Line, is aboard that train. It would mean thousands of dollars to the old road if we can wipe him out of existence."

"How is that, Mr. Squires?"

"He is the backbone, the whole thing I might say, of the opposition road. Without him at the helm, the Round Top would in time go to pieces as a first-class line, and the Blue Line would then step in and absorb it and thus squelch it as a dangerous competitor. Whitney owns, or at least controls, three-quarters of the stock of the Round Top, and is a hard man to down. At this moment he is putting through that plan of his—a tunnel under Round Top mountain. When completed it will drive the Blue Line into the position of a second-class road, for by doing away with the thirty-mile swing around the foothills of the range the Round Top line will be able to save forty minutes' time on the run to Harrison Junction, and thus make closer connections with the P. D. & Q. for all points east and southeast."

"I see," said the man who had been addressed as Morgan. "The object is to do up this man Whitney."

"You've got the idea exactly," replied Mr. Squires. "As soon as I heard that he was a passenger on the afternoon express I made up my mind as to the course I should pursue. The Round Top strikes the river a short distance this side of Prescott, and parallels it to a point half a mile below here. At that point there is a side-track leading down to the edge of a turn in the stream. The switch there misplaced, the express, which passes that spot half an hour from now, will go straight into the river. It will carry President Whitney to his death, and save the fortunes of the old Blue Line. Now you understand the situation?"

"I reckon we do," said Gibson, with a short laugh. "Now who's to tamper with the switch?"

"You two must cast lots to see which takes the risk of the job," said Mr. Squires.

"All right. What shall it be, the toss of a coin?" asked Gibson.

"That's as good as anything else, and the most convenient," answered Mr. Squires. "If you wish I'll toss it for you. Suppose you call the turn, Morgan."

"I'm willing."

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

Mr. Squires flipped a half dollar.

"Heads," called out Morgan.

"Heads it is," remarked Mr. Squires. "The job is up to you, Gibson."

"All right, sir. I'd better start at once."

"I think you had. You haven't any too much time to do the work and get out of harm's way. As for you, Morgan, it will be your duty to look out for the track walker who goes over that part of the line just before the express is due. See to it that he fails to reach the neighborhood of the switch. Do you understand?"

"I understand, sir. I've a good pair of arms, and the man I hug will think a grizzly bear had hold of him."

"You ought to be able to get down to the switch, do your work and get back here before the express passes Prescott. That will give us time to reach the top of the hill, whence we can get a full glimpse of the accident."

Gibson and Morgan immediately left the presence of Mr. Squires, who remained seated on the trunk, mounted their horses and rode off toward the river, which they had to cross by a stout wooden bridge to reach the Round Top track on the other bank.

Fred Stone had listened to the foregoing conversation like one in a dream.

Its horrible purport seemed to freeze the very blood in his veins.

He could scarcely conceive of anything more diabolical than this plan to dump the afternoon express from Harrison Junction into the swiftly flowing river and cause the loss of a hundred or more lives merely to compass the murder of one man who was feared by the management of the old Blue Line.

Fred stood frozen, as it were, to the spot, while the two rascals rode away to carry into effect their villainous design.

As the sound of their horses' hoofs died away, Fred pulled himself together like a person waking up from a fearful nightmare.

"There's only one thing to be done," he breathed, resolutely. "I must interfere and try and prevent the execution of this murderous scheme. Half a mile is not a great distance for me to run, and then by hiding somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of the switch I can watch until those scoundrels leave after accomplishing their object, and then undo their work and save the train by returning the switch to its proper position. Yes, that's what I'll do."

Fred had not dared to peer through the thick clump of bushes at the rascally conspirators on the other side for fear he should betray his presence as a listener.

Consequently he had no idea of the identity of the men.

Neither was he aware that one of them had remained behind.

Therefore, when he hastily started for the road from behind the leafy screen Mr. Squires saw him and was thunderstruck by his presence on the spot at that moment.

Squires, however, was a man of quick thought and action.

He instantly suspected that the boy had heard all that had passed between himself and his partners in the projected piece of villainy.

That portended unpleasant consequences for themselves.

Something must be done and that quickly to choke off the boy.

So he sprang to his feet before Fred was aware of his presence and dashed at him.

Fred heard his rush and looked around to see what it meant.

Before he could put himself into a posture of defence, Mr. Squires was upon him with the force of a far Western cyclone. Both went down in a heap on the turf, Fred, unfortunately, underneath.

Mr. Squires jumped astride of him and held him down.

It was then that Fred awoke to the unpleasant fact that he was in the power of one of the villains.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLYING LEAP.

Although Mr. Squires was a good-sized man and had every advantage of the situation, Fred did not propose to give in without a struggle.

He was a strong and vigorous boy, and the urgency of the occasion nerved him to do his best to get free.

Mr. Squires, who was equally determined to maintain the upper hand, and hold the lad until his associates returned, threw his whole weight on Fred's chest and succeeded in preventing him from squirming out of his position.

"Lie still, you young cur!" exclaimed the man, through his teeth. "Lie still or it will be the worse for you."

"What do you mean by attacking me in this way?" demanded Fred, ceasing to struggle in order to regain his breath and energies for a renewal of the mix-up.

"What were you doing behind those bushes, just now?"

"I don't see that it is any of your business," retorted the boy.

"Don't you? Well, I'm making it my business to find out."

Fred made no reply.

"Are you going to answer me, you young monkey?"

The boy maintained a dogged silence.

"I suppose you were listening to the conversation I had with those two men who just left, eh?"

Fred didn't say anything.

"You won't answer, I see. Very well, then I must take your silence for an admission that you were listening. People who butt in where they have no business to generally get into trouble. I can see your finish, for you probably know more than it would be safe for us to let escape."

"You are a scoundrel," gritted Fred.

"Thank you for the compliment," laughed Mr. Squires, harshly. "Hard words break no bones. Oh, you will, will you?"

The last sentence was called forth by a sudden effort on the boy's part to unseat the man from his chest.

"Very foxy move on your part, but it didn't work, did it? Thought to catch me off my guard, eh? I'm too old a fox to be caught napping. If I had a stone, or something hard handy, I'd knock a little sense into that skull of yours. Never mind, my companions will be back soon, and then we'll attend to your case."

"What do you mean to do with me?"

"That's up to you. If you'll admit the full extent of your knowledge of our movements, I'll talk business with you."

"What do you mean by business?"

"Where do you live?" asked Mr. Squires, without noticing his question.

"In Dover."

"What business brings you out here?"

"I was going to Prescott."

"What took you behind those bushes?"

"There is a spring there, and I stopped to get a drink of water."

"You did, eh? It didn't take you fifteen minutes to take a drink. Why didn't you show yourself when you got through instead of hiding there and listening to our conversation?"

"How do you know I was listening to your conversation?" asked Fred, doggedly.

"I am sure of it."

"Oh, well, if you're sure of it, nothing I can say will amount to anything."

"What did you hear?"

"You ought to know what I heard since you insist that I was listening to what you said."

"Did you hear all we said?"

"I haven't admitted that I heard a word."

"I know you haven't; but you did, just the same."

"All right—have it your way."

"You'd better admit what you know or——"

"Or what?" asked Fred, as Mr. Squires paused.

"We'll take it for granted you know everything, and deal with you accordingly."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said," gritted Mr. Squires.

"I don't understand you."

"You'll understand when my associates return."

"Are you going to hold me down this way till they get back?"

"I am. Better own up while the chance is yours."

"Suppose I do, what then?"

"We may let you off easy."

"And if I admit nothing?"

"Then you'll probably go into the creek above here with a stone attached to your feet."

"That would be murder."

"We'd call it self-preservation, which is the first law of nature," laughed Mr. Squires, unpleasantly.

"And you'd commit a crime because you imagined I heard you three talking together here a little while ago?"

"I am satisfied you heard enough of our talk to make it extremely unsafe for us to let you get away to spread the news."

"Then what do you mean by saying that if I owned up to having heard the whole of your conversation you'd let me off easy?"

"In that case you'd have to swear to keep the matter secret at the risk of your life."

"And suppose I'm willing to swear that I didn't hear a word you said?"

"I should not believe you."

At that moment Fred heard the distant gallop of the returning horsemen.

It spurred him into making a fresh effort to save himself from the possible consequences his captor's words suggested.

It might be that his life depended on the success of his struggles.

With a desperate tug he freed his wrists from the grip Mr. Squires had upon them.

Then he grappled the man about the waist and tried to throw him.

Mr. Squire's efforts to maintain his seat on Fred's chest prevented him using his fists to strike the boy in the head or face.

They squirmed about from side to side until Gibson and Morgan rode up and dismounted.

Both of them were astonished to see the struggle that was going on between Mr. Squires and the boy.

As soon as Mr. Squires saw them his face lit up with satisfaction.

"Come here, both of you, and help me to secure this young monkey."

"What's the trouble?" asked Gibson as he came forward.

"Trouble enough. The cub was behind those bushes all the time we were talking and he's on to our plans to do the express. We've got to silence him, or it will be the hangman's rope for the three of us if the job goes through."

"Oh, the job will go through all right; don't you fear. So this chap was listening, was he?"

"He heard every word. I'm willing to swear, though he won't own up."

"Then he'll have to go the way of the express, I'm thinkin'."

I'm not goin' to put my neck into a noose to save the life of any man or boy either on the face of the globe. Hold him steady now till I can grab his feet."

Fred saw the game was about up with him.

He made one last determined effort, however.

Mr. Squires was taken slightly off his guard and Fred succeeded in rolling him over on his back.

Then the plucky boy sprang to his feet.

"Seize him, Gibson!" roared Mr. Squires.

Gibson made a grab for the lad.

Fred ducked and slipped under his extended arms.

Then he dashed around the bushes with the three men at his heels.

He led them a pretty lively chase among the many obstructions that abounded in that plot of ground, and finally doubled like a hare on them and started at full tilt for the road.

"He mustn't get away," shouted Mr. Squires.

Gibson and Morgan didn't intend that the boy should if they could prevent it.

But Fred had something of a lead on them, and his mind had conceived a plan for escaping them.

While he was sure he could easily outrun them if he took to the level road, he knew they would be able to ride him down on horseback in no time.

The idea that occurred to him was to seize one of the animals himself and make off, trusting to the hope of out-riding them, for he was an expert horseman.

He put this scheme into execution as soon as he reached the road.

Gibson, in his hurry to obey Mr. Squire's call, had not stopped to tie his animal—a fine, fleet-footed mare.

Fred noted that fact, and singling the horse out, sprang on her back and digging his heels into her flanks, headed back the way the men had just come—that is toward the river and the railroad beyond.

Mr. Squires gave a shout of rage when he saw the tactics of the boy.

He rushed for his own horse—an animal that showed speed in every limb.

Tearing the bridle from the tree, he sprang into the saddle and darted after the fleeing boy as fast as he could make his charger go.

Morgan imitated his example, while Gibson followed the procession on foot.

It promised to be a wild chase.

The road led up a slight rise, then switched around to the left, where a gentle declivity ran down to the wooden bridge which spanned the river at its narrowest point.

A strange thing, however, had happened to the bridge since Gibson and Morgan repassed it a short time before.

Then it seemed to be perfect, now a formidable looking hole appeared in the planking.

It must have been that the boards had in the course of time become loosened from their hold on the supporting timbers, and that the hoofs of the horses ridden by Gibson and Morgan had completed their demoralization.

At any rate, a few minutes after the rascals had recrossed the bridge the planks fell with a splash into the water below and floated away down the river.

Fred, of course, never dreamed of the pitfall that lay in his path; nor did his relentless pursuers.

The boy, urging his spirited animal to her top speed, came rushing like the wind down the slight declivity toward the river bank.

Mr. Squires turned the top of the elevation a fraction of a minute behind him, for his mount was superior to the lad's.

For the moment it looked like a dead sure thing that the rascal would overtake his quarry before the boy could reach the other side of the river.

As the mare struck the bridge at a two-forty clip, Fred's heart went suddenly cold, for right before him yawned the gap where the half dozen planks were missing.

It was utterly impossible for him to avoid the issue that lay in his way.

Had he tried to pull in the mare she would assuredly have slipped straight into the abyss.

There was only one thing to do, that was to take the chasm as one would hurdle, and the result depended on the horse alone.

The animal, however, was equal to the emergency.

She took a flying leap and landed him safely beyond the break.

Mr. Squires, who had counted on overtaking the boy in another minute, reined in just in time to save himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAVING THE EXPRESS.

Mr. Squires uttered a fierce imprecation as he saw the boy receding from his clutches, and he utterly powerless to follow him except on foot, which would only be a useless proceeding.

Morgan came up at that moment and saw the difficulty which barred further pursuit on horseback.

Both said things that wouldn't look well in print.

"How did that happen?" asked Morgan, staring in surprise at the gap.

"How should I know?" retorted Mr. Squires. "If any one should understand the matter it ought to be you and Gibson, for you two came this way not over ten minutes ago."

"The bridge was all right then, otherwise we never would have been able to get across."

His statement sounded reasonable, and Mr. Squires saw no reason to doubt his words.

"Well, it isn't all right now. If it hadn't been that Gibson's mare took the hole in the handsomest style I'd have had the boy, or he would have been in the river with the horse, which would probably have answered our purpose just as well."

"That's right; but as he has got away, what is to be done?"

"Nothing but to make ourselves exceedingly scarce around this locality."

"There's the whistle of the express at the crossing," said Morgan.

"I hear it. If that boy is onto the situation, as I believe he is, he may be able to save the train."

"As things have turned out I hope he will. He has our descriptions, and I prefer not to swing even to earn a thousand dollars, and to oblige the management of the Blue Line Railroad."

"Perhaps you're right, Morgan. No doubt we shall find other ways of earning the money that will answer the same purpose."

"I hope so."

At that moment Gibson came running up out of breath.

"What stopped you people?" he wanted to know.

"Better use your eyes and you'll get the answer."

Gibson turned around and saw the gap in the bridge.

He ripped out a forcible ejaculation.

"How did that occur?" he asked, in some astonishment.

"Surely the boy didn't—"

"Do that? I should say not," replied Mr. Squires curtly. "If he had ridden either of the other horses it likely would have finished him; but your mare took it like a hunter. I never saw a prettier jump in my life."

"The mare is some on the jump," replied Gibson; "but blast the luck! I suppose I have lost her now for good."

"I suppose you have. Well, we'd better turn back. Morgan will take you up behind him."

Gibson, with many imprecations on the head of the brave boy who had got away with his horse, was compelled to adopt that mode of retreat from the place that promised soon to be too hot to hold the party.

In the meantime Fred was riding as hard as he could go toward the railroad.

As he came in sight of the switch, with the side track branching down to the bank of the river, he heard the whistle of the express as it passed the crossing less than a mile away.

He urged the mare forward, and the animal responded nobly.

The locomotive burst into view up the track as Fred flung himself from the saddle and ran to the open switch.

The lock had been broken by Gibson, with an implement he had brought along for the purpose, and the iron staple, while it held the switch in its misplaced position, could easily be drawn out so as to permit the lever to be pulled over, and the main track made perfect again.

This Fred hastened to do.

The engineer had an instant before noticed by the inclined appearance of the switch lever that the switch was open, and he knew what that meant.

He whistled down-brakes, reversed the lever in the cab, and opened the sand valves, but the momentum of the train was too great to be overcome in time to have saved it but for Fred's presence and prompt action.

The train slid past with greening, brake-locked wheels, but safe on the main track, and the engineer lost no time resuming his course when he saw that all was right.

The windows were filled with a host of startled faces, for the passengers had been badly shaken up, but not one knew

the part he had played in the preservation of Fred Stone.

"Thank heaven!" he ejaculated. "I have circumvented those scoundrels and saved the express. It was a close call for those people; but a miss they say is as good as a mile. I guess I've made a fine horse by the operation."

At that moment he saw a roughly dressed man running toward him.

Fred waited for him to come up.

"Say, what does all this mean?" demanded the man.

He was the track-walker, and there was blood on his face where Morgan had struck him down insensible with a stone.

"It means that the afternoon express came within an ace of going into the river."

"Was the switch open?"

"It was. And set so on purpose."

"Good gracious! Do you mean it?" gasped the man, a look of horror coming over his features.

"I do. Three scoundrels planned the job, and would have succeeded in carrying their design out only I overheard them plotting to do it, and got away from them in time to frustrate their scheme."

"Then it must have been one of them that knocked me senseless with a stone in the cut."

"It certainly was. A fellow by the name of Morgan. He was sent to look for you while his companion, Gibson, was misplacing the switch."

"This matter must be reported at once," said the track walker, wiping the blood from his face. "Come with me. There's a signal tower at the crossing just around the curve yonder," pointing in the direction of Prescott. "We'll take the news to the operator there."

So, leading the mare by her bridle, Fred accompanied the man to the signal tower.

Fred told his story to the tower man and he wired the news to the division superintendent, sending in Fred's name and address.

Then the boy continued on to Prescott.

He rode to the yards of the Round Top Railroad at that town, and found his way to the roundhouse, where he inquired for Brackett, the foreman.

"Well, what do you want?" asked a square-built, stern-visaged man of thirty-two.

"Are you Mr. Brackett?" asked Fred.

"That's my name," replied the foreman, looking the boy over with a sharp eye.

"I'm looking for work. Can you give me a job?"

"Anybody send you here?"

"Sam Hawley told me to apply to you."

"What's your name?"

"Fred Stone."

"You're the boy he was speaking to me about this morning. What kind of work are you looking for?"

"Any kind I can get."

"Well, the only kind of work for an inexperienced person in this place is that of wiper."

"Can you give me a job as wiper, sir?"

"I can. I suppose you understand it is the lowest and dirtiest work on a railroad."

"I suppose so, from what Sam Hawley told me."

"He's been through the mill and ought to know," replied the foreman with a grim smile. "You'll have to wipe engines, shovel ashes, wash out boilers and tanks, turn the table, help the machinists to lug and lift, and do a score of other things equally unpleasant."

"But engine wipers stand a show of becoming firemen, don't they?"

"If they're uncommonly smart, yes; but promotion, as a rule, comes slow. A man must wipe long enough to become familiar with every part of an engine, and know how one is run before he can get something better."

"Well, I've decided to become a locomotive engineer some day, and expect to begin at the foot of the ladder."

"You mean that, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You live in Leaver, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Clerking in a general store?"

"I am."

"When can you come to work?"

"Inside of a week."

"Very well. Report here first Monday morning at seven o'clock and I'll put you to work as a wiper. You'll have to live here in Prescott, of course."

"I understand that. I'm going to room with Sam Hawley."

"All right. I'll expect to see you next Monday."

The foreman turned away and entered the roundhouse, whence issued the sound of hammering.

At that moment an engine was run in on the table, and some wipers swung it around.

Then it was backed toward the roundhouse.

It came to a stop just outside the door, and the wipers started in upon it.

Fred watched them with great interest.

"That's what I'll be doing myself next week," he mused. "It's dirty work; but nevertheless it gives a fellow a start in life."

With those words he returned to where he had hitched his horse, mounted it and took the county road back for Dover.

CHAPTER IX.

A START IN LIFE.

Fred had some doubts about his reception by Mr. Grice when he got back to the store, but there were no unpleasant results, much to his satisfaction.

He put the mare, which had come into his possession in such a stirring manner, into the stable, and wondered if the man Gibson would make any very strong effort under the circumstances to recover his property, if the animal was his property.

Next morning Fred notified Mr. Grice to engage another boy to take his place, and the postmaster, instead of flying into a rage, as the boy expected he would, calmly nodded, and the matter was considered to be settled.

"He took the thing mighty easy after all," thought Fred; "I wonder what has caused him to change front so quickly?"

The fact of the matter was Mr. Grice had come to the conclusion that he would not keep Fred any longer, row or no row, and he decided to make the best of the case.

He had written to the Universal Trust Co., of New York, for information about his half-brother's will, and he fully expected the reply would show that he was the beneficiary under the codicil.

Now that Jack Barnstable was out of the way, and daily getting further away from chance contact with the son of his dear old cap'n, Mr. Grice entertained strong hopes that when the time limit mentioned in the will had expired the \$100,000 worth of bonds would come into his hands.

As soon as he got hold of them he intended to sell out the store and take himself to parts unknown, so that if the duplicity of his conduct was ever discovered he could not be traced and compelled to "cough up" his half-brother's property.

All this had a tendency to reconcile him to the inevitable parting with the boy it was his purpose to wrong in so gross a manner.

About noon that day a weazel-faced man of medium height, with very smart eyes, entered the store and asked for Fred.

Mr. Grice, to whom the inquiry had been addressed, jerked his thumb toward the rear of the place where the boy was filling orders he had collected around the village that morning.

The weazel-faced man tapped the lad lightly on the shoulder.

"Fred Stone, I believe," he said, in a quick and rather peremptory tone.

"Yes, sir; that's my name," replied the boy, wondering who his visitor could be.

"My card," said the man, tendering a piece of pasteboard which read "John Sharpley," and in one corner, in small type, "Round Top RR. Co."

"You wish to see me about—"

"The attempt made by three rascals, whose names you reported as"—here the sharp-featured man consulted his memorandum book—"Squires, Gibson and Morgan, to wreck the afternoon flyer at Green River siding, by opening the switch at that point for the purpose of shunting the express into the river."

"I gave all the particulars of the affair to the operator of Tower 16, two miles this side of Prescott," replied Fred.

"Exactly. I am one of the road detectives, and I have called on you to obtain a more explicit account of the outrageous scheme, and as close a description as you can give me of the rascals themselves."

"I will tell you the whole story," and Fred told the detective that he had started for Prescott to get a job in the roundhouse of the railroad company, and that going to the fact that he had stopped at the roadside spring to get a drink he had overheard the plot to wreck the train, the avowed object of which, according to the words of Mr. Squires, who seemed to be the moving spirit

of the enterprise, was to cause the death of President White of the Round Top road because he was regarded as a dangerous factor to the interests of the Blue Line, the original road between Galena and Harrison Junction on the P. D. & Q. trunk line, which the Round Top practically paralleled, greatly to the detriment of the Blue Line's passenger and freight traffic.

"Ha!" exclaimed the detective. "This seems to be a much more serious matter than we had any idea of. Are you prepared to swear to the truth of all the facts you have just stated to me, young man?"

"I am," replied Fred, promptly.

"Be careful now, my lad," said Mr. Sharpley, solemnly. "Remember that you are bringing a grave charge to the attention of the management of the Round Top Company—a charge that must reflect, even indirectly, on the management of the Blue Line."

"I am making no charge against anybody but the three men implicated in the attempt to wreck the express," replied Fred.

"I understand that. But a sinister construction will undoubtedly be placed on the conversation you assert that you overheard. Of course, it will be impossible for you to verify your statement, as you have no witness to corroborate it. Still your story, made under oath, will carry a certain weight that cannot but lead to complications between the managements of the two roads."

"I am ready to swear to what I heard, sir. Beyond that I have nothing to say."

"Very well. Go on with your story."

Fred then described how, after Gibson and Morgan had departed on their crooked errand, he had been captured by Mr. Squires, whom he thought had accompanied the others, and the fruitless struggle he had made to escape from the man's clutches; how the return of the two rascals had caused Mr. Squires to slightly relax his vigilant hold on him, which he had taken immediate advantage of; how he had escaped on the back of Gibson's horse, now in Mr. Grice's stable, and had reached the siding just in time to turn the switch lever into its proper position and thus save the train from leaving the main track, which must have resulted in its destruction as contemplated by the trio of villains whom he had overreached.

The balance of his story, which related to his meeting with the track-walker and going, at the man's suggestion, to Tower 16 and telling the operator the particulars of the attempted wreck, was soon told.

"Young man," said the detective, "you have rendered a valuable service to the Round Top Company which I can assure you will receive suitable recognition. Now I shall have to request you to come with me before a justice of the peace, who will take down your story in writing and witness your signature under oath."

"I am ready to go with you. Please make your request to Mr. Grice."

Mr. Sharpley spoke to the storekeeper, who grudgingly permitted Fred to accompany the detective to Squire Barker's office, where the matter was put through in accordance with the railroad man's views.

"I am very much obliged to you, Stone," said the detective, when they left the lawyer's office. "I think it likely that you will be requested to go to Galena to repeat your story before the Board of Directors of the Round Top. At any rate, do not be surprised if you receive such an invitation and do not fail to comply with it, for it will be greatly to your advantage to do so. Good-by."

Fred had furnished the detective with a very fair description of Gibson and Morgan, and a pretty accurate one of Mr. Squires, so that Mr. Sharpley had great hopes of being able to run down the three rascals, who seemed to be acting under some kind of an understanding with persons interested in the Blue Line management.

That night Fred called on Kittle Clyde and told her that he had secured a job as wiper in the Prescott roundhouse of the Round Top Railroad, and that he was going to start to work on the following Monday.

"I'll be able to see you every Sunday, Kittle, as Prescott is only eight miles from this village, that is if you are to have me call upon you as often as that."

"Why, of course I'd like to have you call, Fred," replied Kittle, in a pleased tone. "I'm awfully glad you're not going so far away as Chicago."

"Same here. It's a wonder I never thought of tackling railroading before when the idea is just to my taste. As often as I have talked with Sam Hawley, it never occurred to me, nor to him either, that this was the line that best suited my inclinations. When I told Sam Sunday night that I thought

of going to Chicago to make a decent start in life, then he brought the subject up in a way that opened my eyes to the possibilities presented by a railway career. It is my ambition now to become a first-class locomotive engineer, and you'll find, Kittle, that I'll get there if I live."

Next morning a messenger from the station agent at Prescott rode over to Dover and delivered a telegraphic message to Fred, requesting him to take the afternoon express for Galena, the conductor of which had orders to stop at the flag crossing, one mile outside of Dover, expressly to pick him up.

An official of the road would meet him at the Galena depot, and he would be considered the guest of the Round Top Company until returned to Dover.

Fred showed the despatch to Mr. Grice, who made a kick against his absence from the store, but in the end gave him reluctant permission to go to Galena.

When the express slowed up at the crossing Fred was waiting there ready to board it.

The conductor took him into a drawing-room car and left him there until the train reached Galena at seven o'clock that evening.

President Whitney's private secretary took charge of him at the depot and carried him off in a cab to a hotel, where he registered and dined with his conductor in a big room whose splendor and cuisine was a revelation to the country boy, accustomed all his life to the meager bill of fare provided by the Dover postmaster.

At half-past eight o'clock he was introduced to the Board room of the Directors of the Round Top Railroad, where he was politely received by the president and other officials identified with the road's management.

Detective Sharpley was also present.

Here he told his remarkable story of the knavery of the three men who had tried to wreck the express on Monday afternoon, and was cross-examined at some length as to the exact words of the conversation he had overheard between Mr. Squires and his assistants.

In no particular did his story vary from his sworn statement that lay before President Whitney on the long table.

The directors all looked very grave when he had concluded.

He received their thanks, and President Whitney's promise that he would be well rewarded for his praiseworthy conduct in the matter.

He was then taken back to the hotel, where he passed the night in a room that seemed to his eyes palatial.

After breakfast next morning he was carried to the depot in a cab in time to board the morning express for Harrison Junction.

He was dropped off at the flag crossing in accordance with express orders to the conductor, and at half-past two was back at the store.

Sunday morning he packed his few belongings into a well worn grip, and after dinner bade good-by to Mr. Grice and Mrs. Burns, the housekeeper.

Before leaving he tendered the use of Gibson's mare to the postmaster for his keep, and Mr. Grice promised to look after the animal, which was a much superior horse to the old nag he owned.

Then, grip in hand, Fred went over to Sam Hawley's house, where he met Sam and had supper.

After the meal he made a call on Kittle.

Here he remained until Sam called for him at nine o'clock.

"Well," said Fred as they walked over to the flag crossing to catch a freight for Prescott, "I'm making a start in life at last."

"That's what you are. You were only vegetating at the store, and never would have amounted to a row of shucks if you remained there."

"I know that. I'm glad that I'm not bound for Chicago. I should feel pretty homesick if I was."

"Bet your life you would. When a fellow has lived all his life in a place, especially a country village like Dover, he's bound to feel pretty sore when he comes to the point of breaking off old ties—particularly when one of those ties is a pretty girl like Kittle Clyde," grinned Sam.

"Oh, come off; don't get funny," replied Fred, flushing up.

But just then the freight came lumbering along, and the boys swung themselves aboard of the caboose.

CHAPTER X.

A DOUBLE REWARD.

On Monday morning Fred appeared at the roundhouse in overalls and jumper ready for work.

The first task he was put at was shoveling ashes, and it

engaged his attention for more than an hour, when he was called upon by one of the machinists to help carry a heavy casting to a certain part of the roundhouse.

Later on he got his first chance at helping to clean a locomotive that had just been run into the house from the table outside.

After that he found plenty to keep him busy, and long before noon Fred was smeared with dirt and grease, which was a new experience for him.

The foreman passed him by several times in the course of the morning, but never stopped nor opened his mouth to the new hand.

Fred thought that perhaps Brackett had so much on his mind that he did not notice him, but that was not the fact.

The foreman had watched him without appearing to do so, a trick of his, and noticed that the lad never stood around with his hands in his pockets after completing a job, but hustled around of his own accord to find another one.

He was helping at cleaning another locomotive when dinner hour came, and he sat down in a sunny corner to eat what he had brought with him.

So far he had had no opportunity to meet Sam Hawley, who was in the cab of a switch engine moving around in another part of the yard.

After finishing with the locomotive his services were called into requisition by a machinist, who was making some repairs on an engine.

The man was a sociable sort of fellow and he took a kind of fancy to Fred.

When the boy, who watched to see how things were done, and passed the tools as the machinist required them, asked some questions about different parts of the locomotive, the man readily gratified his craving for knowledge.

In this way Fred quickly caught on to a lot of miscellaneous information that would subsequently be of great value to him, for he possessed an excellent memory and readily retained what came under his notice.

The afternoon passed away far more quickly than he had any idea of, and he was rather surprised when told it was time to knock off for the day.

"Well," said Sam, when he ran against his friend after washing up, "how did things pan out with you to-day?"

"All right," answered Fred, cheerfully.

"Do you think you'll like the work and will stick it out till you learn enough to get in line for something better?"

"Sure I will. I'm not a quitter."

"I didn't think you were, though lots of chaps start in like you have and give up the job in no time at all. You see a new hand always gets hold of the dirtiest work that's around. The other wipers shove it onto him when they can just to see how long he'll stand it."

"Is that a fact? Well, I suppose I've got to expect such courtesies, then. I had an easy job this afternoon, anyway. I was helping one of the machinists who was repairing a locomotive. All I did was to pass him the tools he wanted and ask questions."

"Ask questions?" grinned Sam. "What kind of questions?"

"About the different parts of the engine."

"Did he answer you?"

"Sure he did. He gave me a heap of information, and I've got it all here."

Fred tapped his forehead significantly and looked wise.

"You are making a good beginning, old man," said Sam.

"Keep it up and the first thing you know you'll be asked to fire a switch engine. That's the first real step upward."

The boys went to a restaurant for their supper, which, though nothing to boast of in Sam's opinion, was in Fred's eyes a banquet when compared with Mr. Grice's evening meal.

While Fred was cleaning the driving-rod of a locomotive next morning, Brackett came up and paused alongside of him.

After watching him at his work a moment or two he said:

"Look here, Stone, are you the boy who saved the afternoon express from going into the river a week ago yesterday?"

"Yes, sir," replied Fred respectfully.

"I saw your name in the papers, but it never struck me that you were the hero of that affair until the yardmaster mentioned the matter to me and gave me this letter to hand to you. It bears the imprint of the president's office at Galena."

"Thank you, sir," said Fred, putting the letter in his pocket without opening it.

"I reckon you won't be long with us now," said the foreman.

"Why not?"

"You'll be able to pick out a job that might be more congenial to you. You are bound to have a pull with the company

after what you did, which you ought to be able to work to your advantage."

"I'm satisfied where I am, sir."

"As a wiper?" asked the foreman in some surprise.

"Yes, sir. I mean to make it a stepping-stone to the post of engineer."

"Then you intend to use your pull to that end, eh?"

"No, sir. That's not my way of doing business. All I ask or will accept from you or the company is a fair deal. I don't expect to be advanced until I deserve it. When I have acquired the necessary knowledge and experience I hope to go ahead, not otherwise. I expect to become a first-class engineer in time, and I couldn't do that if I was permitted to skim over any part of the practical education I ought to have. I hope you understand me, sir."

"I think I do," replied the foreman with a grunt of satisfaction.

"I shall accept no favors from the company, and I hope you will not be induced to push me ahead too fast. It would not be just to me, nor fair to the other wipers."

"Don't worry about the other wipers. It's the best man that get's ahead under me. If you climb over any one's head it will be because you deserve the advancement."

"Thank you, sir. That's all I ask," replied Fred.

"He's a comer, or I'm mistaken," muttered Brackett, as he moved off. "Ninety-nine chaps out of a hundred would pull the company's leg to its fullest extent, if they were in this young fellow's place. And in the end what would they amount to? This boy has true grit and ambition to succeed. He'll reach the cab one of these days as sure as eggs are eggs."

Fred forgot all about that letter until he and Sam were seated at a table in the restaurant waiting for their supper to be served.

Then he pulled it out of his pocket, tore off the end and took out the enclosure.

"What have you got there?" asked Sam curiously. "That looks official."

"It's from the president of the Round Top," replied Fred.

"Hello! What's that? Checks?" cried Sam, opening his eyes very wide.

Fred took up the two oblong sheets of bond paper, one after the other.

They are checks without a doubt—one on the Galena National Bank for the sum of \$5,000, payable to the order of Fred Stone, and signed by the Treasurer of the Round Top Railroad Co., the other the personal check of President Whitney for \$1,000, also payable to the order of Fred Stone.

The letter explained that the directors of the company had voted Fred \$5,000 in recognition of his services in saving the express, and Mr. Whitney said he took great pleasure in forwarding the check to him, together with his own check for a thousand as a slight evidence of his gratitude to the boy for saving his life.

"Gee! You're rich!" exclaimed Sam, as he regarded the valuable pieces of paper with bulging eyes. "Six thousand dollars! My gracious! What are you going to do with all that money?"

"What should I do with it but put it in some good bank and let it stay there?"

"My, but you're in luck!" said Sam. "I suppose you'll shake the roundhouse with its dirt and grime now."

"Not on your life."

"Are you really going to stick?"

"Why not?"

"Most any chap with \$6,000 at his back would want a better job than that."

"Well, I expect to get a better job as soon as I can work my way to it."

"You're one in a thousand, Fred."

"Oh, I don't know. There are others, I guess. I don't propose to let that \$6,000 stand in my way. Not if I know it. I look upon it simply as a lucky windfall that may come in handy some day. I'd be a fool if I lost my head over it at this stage in my career. Why I'm only starting out in life. I intend to make my own way ahead. The money can take care of itself."

Evidently Fred had a level head—one of the prime factors of success.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST STEP UPWARD.

Months passed away and Fred worked steadily and faithfully at his duties of wiper and general assistant in the roundhouse.

During that time he visited Dover regularly every Sunday.

He always made it a point to drop in at the rear of the store and pass a few minutes either with Mr. Grice or the housekeeper, with whom he was a great favorite.

The balance of the time he divided between Sam and Kittie and other friends in the village.

Mr. Grice welcomed him with a peculiar sardonic grin, which Fred could not interpret.

The storekeeper had received full particulars from the Universal Trust Company in New York about the provisions of Captain Benjamin Sands's will, and it turned out just as he had hoped, that in default of the discovery of his son within a certain time, provided no reasonable prospect existed that the boy would be found, he, Peter Grice, was to succeed to the property of his half-brother.

Mr. Grice had the date marked down in red ink in his private memorandum book, and he was now counting the days that intervened before he could legally put in his claim for the bonds.

The only thing that bothered him was that Jack Barnstable might possibly turn up again in the village before the time expired, and learn the true state of affairs.

The chances, however, were against such a thing happening, so that Mr. Grice had now contracted the habit of rubbing his skinny hands together and mentally congratulating himself on his promised good luck.

One morning while Fred was helping another wiper turn the table to receive a locomotive that was about to run out of the roundhouse, a yard engineer came up and touched him on the shoulder.

"You're Fred Stone, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy.

"I want to use you."

"All right. I'm at your service."

"Come with me."

Fred followed the engineer over to engine 32, used for switching purposes, which was ready to go out of the roundhouse.

"Jump into the cab."

Fred, wondering what the grimy looking man wanted him to do, swung himself up the iron steps.

The engineer followed him.

After looking at the gauge, and noting that everything was all right, the man said gruffly: "Ring."

Fred looked at him in astonishment.

"I don't quite understand—" he began.

"Don't understand, eh?" growled the engineer. "Didn't you hear what I said? I told you to ring the bell. I've just got the signal to run out."

"Am I to fire for you?" asked Fred, hardly believing that such good luck was his at last.

"Of course you are—Brackett's order. Ring!"

Fred mechanically pulled the bell-rope, the engineer opened her up a bit and let off the brake.

Then No. 32 ran out on the table and was switched onto a certain track.

"Keep the gauge about where it is now," said the engineer, thereby intimating that his new fireman was to keep steam up to a certain notch as shown by the hand that shivered on the dial.

"All right, sir," replied Fred, with a thrill of joy.

This wasn't the first time the boy had been on an engine, but it was the first time he had been called upon to fire one.

Small wonder if he felt nervous and excited at his new experience.

Besides he knew that he was on trial, and that if he failed to acquit himself to advantage it might be a long time before he got another chance of the same kind.

He and Sam had several times ridden on the freight locomotive between the flag crossing near Dover and Prescott, when returning to their lodgings of a Sunday night, and Fred had carefully watched how the fireman in the cab supplied the furnace with coal.

There was a peculiar knack in flinging the contents of the shovel so that the coal would be well scattered and evenly distributed upon the glowing bed in the bowels of the engine.

Fred imitated that method with so much success that the engineer had no fault to find with him, for the finger on the dial remained near the point he wanted.

Up and down the yard the engine went pushing and pulling cars about, and moving them from one track to another.

At irregular intervals they had moments of idleness, when the engineer lit his pipe and waited for his signal, when Fred had nothing to do but cast a glance now and again at the gauge to see that the steam did not drop.

When noontime came Fred and the engineer ate their meal in the cab.

Then it was for the first time that the man grew friendly.

He complimented Fred on his work and asked him how long he had been employed in the yard.

"Three months, sir."

"There are men yonder," chucking his thumb toward the roundhouse, "who have been wiping for a year and they haven't caught on to a chance to fire yet. Are you one of Brackett's favorites?"

"Not that I'm aware of, sir," replied the boy. "I've always heard that Mr. Brackett played no favorites."

"I guess you're right about that. He's pretty square with the men. You must be uncommonly smart to get a lift in three months."

"I always try to do my duty, sir."

"If you always do it as well as you have this morning—your first spell at firing at that there's not likely to be any kick coming your way."

"I haven't been hauled over the coals for anything so far."

"Say, your name seems familiar to me," said the engineer, after a short silence. "Seems to me I've seen or heard it somewhere before."

"I'm well-known in Dover village. Maybe you know some of my friends there. Or perhaps you've been talking to Sam Hawley, who fires regularly on 41."

"No," replied the man, shaking his head. "Oh, I remember now, I saw a name almost if not quite identical with yours in the papers some months ago. Whoever the boy was, he saved the afternoon express from going into the river. Remember the circumstance?"

"I ought to, for I am the boy you are talking about."

"You are the boy?" ejaculated the engineer, with a look of astonishment on his features.

"That's right. I saved the express on that occasion."

"Well, upon my word, I never would have dreamed that. You must have kept the affair mighty quiet, for I haven't heard your name mentioned in the yard in connection with it. If the boys knew anything about it they would have circulated the news as sure as you're alive. Does Brackett know about it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did the company do for you?"

"Oh, the company treated me white."

"It's a wonder you didn't strike the division superintendent for a better job than wiper. That's about the worst position in railway service."

"I commenced at the bottom so as to work myself up through the regular channels to engineer."

"Without trying to use any pull?"

"Yes, sir."

"I should think you might get a regular job to fire if you asked for it."

"I might. I prefer not to ask. I want my ability to pull me through."

"I don't see anything the matter with your firing. It suits me all right."

"I'm glad to hear it. I want to please you. If I didn't make good with you I'd probably be turned down as a fireman for some time to come."

"Well, I'll give you a good send-off to the foreman."

"Thank you."

"Your ambition is to become an engineer, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you remain on 32 I'll give you all the points I can."

"I'm much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it."

The engineer looked at the clock in the cab, put up his pipe, and said it wanted a minute or two of one o'clock.

During the afternoon Fred was permitted to take the throttle on several occasions.

He soon got the hang of the engine, and the stage fright which attacked him when he first touched the throttle and let the steam into the cylinders gradually wore off, and he could soon send the machine ahead, or reverse her, or put on the brake, without getting mixed up.

The engineer watched him closely, told him how everything should be done, and gave him a lot of excellent advice.

The afternoon passed swiftly and pleasantly to Fred, who was delighted with his new job, temporarily though he believed it was.

Finally the engineer ran the locomotive into the roundhouse and told the boy to draw the fire and attend to such duties as fell to the fireman's lot.

When Fred finally left the roundhouse he felt that he had not only acquitted himself all right, but had acquired a whole lot of experience.

CHAPTER XII.

AVERTING A DISASTER.

Next morning Fred was told to continue on No. 32.

He was glad to do so, and worked in a congenial atmosphere all day.

Abbott, the engineer, continued to coach him in many ways in the handling of a locomotive, so that when quitting time came the boy felt he had a tolerable accurate knowledge on the subject.

On the following day his assignment to 32 was continued, as the regular fireman was still on the sick list.

About eleven o'clock 32 hauled a dozen box cars down the main track to a point opposite the freight house and came to a stop, awaiting orders.

Abbott took out his pipe and Fred got down from the cab to oil up some of the bearings.

Having finished that job, the boy stopped at the door of the operator's little office at the end of the long shed.

The operator had just stepped outside and was talking to a man half-way down the platform.

Click! Click-click!

At the table in front of the window overlooking the tracks, the telegraphic instrument began to talk.

Click! Click-click!

That was the call of the little office, and to Fred's educated ears—for this was a branch of railroad service with which he was quite familiar—it sounded unusually sharp and insistent.

He shouted to the operator, but that individual's back was toward him and he paid no attention to the summons.

Click! Click-click!

Over and over again the call kept ringing out.

Fred, judging the message to be an important one, decided to take it himself.

He dropped into the operator's chair, seized a pad and then opened up communication with the sender.

Then the message came rippling out, in spasmodic jerks, as if the operator at the other end was in a state of great excitement.

"Urgent—from D. G.—15," it began.

Fred jotted the words down, though he did not know any more than the man in the moon what place D. G.—15 was.

Then followed the message, and it was a startler.

"Shed on fire. Two cars of dynamite and one of powder in immediate danger. Bound to go up unless engine is sent without delay to haul them out. Express, due in 15 minutes, will be blocked unless explosion is averted."

At that moment the operator darkened the door.

He stared in astonishment at the begrimed figure in overalls and jumper and seated before his table writing on the pad.

"What the dickens—" he began.

Fred looked up and recognized him.

"Read!" he said, shoving the pad into the astonished operator's hands.

"D. G.—15. That's Berkeley. What's this?" he cried, as his eyes glanced over the message. "Shed on fire. Two cars dynamite and one of powder—"

"It just came over the wire," palpitated Fred, his eyes shining with excitement and wondering what the operator was going to do about it.

The man sprang into the chair just vacated by Fred.

He called up "D. G.—15" and had the message repeated.

Then he jumped for the door, and looked around.

"Hey, you!" he shouted to Fred. "Uncouple your engine from those box-cars. Where's Abbott?"

The engineer was not in the cab where the boy had last seen him smoking and leaning out of the window.

"Don't know where he is, sir," replied Fred, hastening to uncouple from the six freight cars.

The job was finished in half a minute.

The operator looked around in a stew.

"Get on the man! Where can he have gone? How soon he is wanted and not a moment to be lost! Can you run an engine?" he jerked out suddenly, looking at the young fireman.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I can't wait for Abbott. Get into the cab, chase yourself down to Berkeley—that's a good ten miles from here—and haul out those cars of explosives. You have a clear track before you, but you must get there in ten minutes—understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Fred was in the cab with his hand on the throttle when he uttered those words.

He gave her steam by degrees until he had her hooked up to the last notch and No. 32 going down the road at a 70-mile clip.

Then, after a glance ahead, he threw open the furnace door and began tossing in fuel like mad, pausing every moment or so to glance out of the window to see that the track ahead was clear.

The engine and tender swung from side to side, like a dredger in a gale of wind, and Fred with difficulty kept himself steady enough on his feet to flit the coal into the furnace, the door of which he kept open for increased draught.

It was a matter of shoveling coal continuously all the way to Berkeley, with a delicate, not to say perilous, job ahead when he reached his destination.

The drivers of 32 were flashing up and down in the sunlight so fast that they resembled nothing so much as spokes of fire.

As the locomotive swung around a long, gentle curve in the line Fred saw a cloud of black smoke rising and spreading out above a distant line of trees.

That came from Berkeley without a doubt.

The engine fairly hummed as it slid over the glistening rails.

A crossing was reached and passed, and Fred shivered as he thought what would have been the result if a team had been there as the locomotive flashed by unannounced by whistle or bell.

He let off a shrill and prolonged whistle as he approached the line of woods beyond which lay Berkeley station.

The clock indicated nine minutes from the Prescott yards.

He would do the ten miles in the allotted ten minutes all right, for his destination was now scarcely half a mile away.

Whiz!

The locomotive and tender flew through the wood with another wild and unearthly shriek that awoke the sylvan echoes and frightened the birds.

The burning shed burst into full view a moment later.

Half a dozen cars were drawn up close to the platform, and the flames were perilously near them.

In fact, the last two cars were actually on fire.

A switch tender was standing at the switch holding the siding open so that the expected engine could run right in on the sidetrack without loss of time.

Fred shut off steam and gradually applied the brakes.

Just then the fire obtained fresh headway and a draught of wind blew a sheet of flame directly across the front of the first car.

It set afire a large white paper sign, readable 150 feet away, that was tacked against the end of the car.

The big letters read, "Danger!—Powder!"

Fred saw the blazing paper and the words thereon as the fire consumed them.

He also saw that the roof of the car was smoking from the heat cast by the blazing shed.

It was going to be a mighty close call to save those cars filled with explosives.

If he failed to do it that would be the last of him and the station, which the agent and his assistants were working with desperate haste to save by passing a string of water buckets.

Fred, however, was built of the stuff out of which heroes are made.

The horrible peril he had to face did not deter him an instant in the execution of his duty.

He ran the locomotive right down to the powder car, from the blistered and blackened edge of which only a small section of the danger sign remained fluttering in the breeze unconsumed.

A man was needed to couple the engine to the car, but though he called for one, not a single employee responded, for as the flames had been seen to shoot athwart the powder car the agent and his helpers had quickly abandoned their efforts to save the station and fled the vicinity for their lives.

The boy's effort to save the cars was therefore rendered twice as difficult and perilous, because he had to lose many valuable seconds trying to couple by himself.

He drove the locomotive slowly till he had gauged the distance as closely as he could from his seat in the cab.

Then he stopped, descended to the ground, and ran to the pilot.

He lifted the heavy coupling bar and found that it lacked several inches of reaching the coupling socket of the freight car.

Fortunately he saw a piece of wood lying on the ground close by.

With this he was able to prop the bar up on a dead line with the coupling socket of the box car.

He climbed back into the cab and, laying his hand on the throttle, opened up just enough to drive the bar home.

Then he sprang out, ran along the footboard, leaned over the pilot and dropped the coupling pin into its place.

"Hitched!" palpitated Fred. "Now to draw out to safety."

But his peril at that moment was at the acute stage.

The powder car might blow up at any moment, and the detonation would probably set off the dynamite cars, too.

The explosion would make a clean sweep of everything in the immediate locality, down to the very rails of the roadbed.

The express, too, was almost due to pass that point, though it was probable it would be, or had already been, flagged at the signal tower six miles beyond.

Fred flew back to the cab for the last time, his face blistered by the heat wafted about the locomotive and the cars full of explosive freight from the blazing sheds.

He shoved the reverse lever from the center clear forward.

Then he grasped the throttle, gave it a pull, and as the steam hissed into the cylinders, the driving-wheels spun around with a rush that carried the engine and cars backward like an arrow shot from a bow.

It was hardly a moment before the powder and dynamite cars were beyond the reach of the heat and flame and speeding toward the open switch.

The rush of air, however, fanned the smoldering woodwork on the end of the powder car into little spurts of flame.

Fred saw them as he shut off steam and brought the engine to rest within a few feet of the switch, which the tender closed so as to render the main track all right for the express to pass.

The boy rushed back along the footboard and beat out the fire with his hat, at the same time calling to the switch tender to bring a couple of buckets of water.

The water was hurried brought, and the last speck of danger removed.

Then Fred, for the first time in many minutes, drew a free breath.

His heroic work was successfully accomplished—he had saved thousands of dollars worth of the company's property and prevented a tie-up of the road at that point.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW ENGINEER.

As soon as the agent saw that all danger from an explosion was over, he telegraphed to Signal Tower 14 that the track was clear for the express.

In a few minutes that train came thundering along, only a trifle behind-time, and passed the burning freight sheds with a rush and roar, the car windows alive with curious faces intent on catching a fleeting glimpse of the fire.

Fred left the locomotive still coupled to the cars of explosives near the switch, and lent a hand to help subdue the flames near the station itself.

The fire, after destroying the freight shed, burned itself out without extending to the passenger station and platform.

Then Fred uncoupled from the box cars and started back for Prescott at a slow gait.

There was a crowd around the operator's little office when the boy backed 32 into the yard, and he was given a rousing cheer, for the station agent had forwarded a statement of his heroic conduct under the trying circumstances.

Abbott, looking a bit foolish, was on hand, waiting to rejoin his engine.

"You've done a big thing for yourself, Stone," he said, when he swung himself up into the cab. "The agent at Berkeley wired that not a man living could have done the job better. I'm up against it for being away from the engine. It will be a ten-day lay-off, and so much less pay at the end of the month. I'll bet your days as a wiper are over, and that you'll get a steady job at firing."

Of course the boy's thrilling exploit was known from one end of the yard to the other by the time he got back, and while he was eating his dinner in the cab a score of men, who had never spoken to him before, came up and congratulated him on his plucky behavior.

Sam was among his visitors, and took a seat facing him.

"Say, old chap," he grinned, "you've jumped into uncommon prominence all at once. Let us have your story, will you?"

There's a whole crowd here that are just hungry for the particulars. All we know is that you performed a wonderful act in getting the powder and dynamite cars at Berkeley out of the very jaws of the flames, at the risk of your life. Tell us how you did it."

A dozen men surrounding the cab pressed eagerly forward, full of curiosity to hear the particulars of Fred's achievement from his own lips.

So he good-naturedly obliged his audience.

Every one agreed that he had taken his life in his hands when he coupled on to the cars of explosive material right in the very maw of the fire.

And not one of those present doubted that the boy would be promoted for his gallant conduct.

And they were right.

Fred was told that night to come the next morning to take a regular job as fireman, while the engineer was laid off for a week for being absent from his post of duty.

On the following morning Fred came to the roundhouse at an early hour, for he knew it was his duty to have his engine ready when the engineer appeared.

He soon discovered that he was not to go on a yard engine, but had been slated for a regular run on a freight.

He was set to getting engine No. 18 ready.

This locomotive was to haul the freight train, which had come in during the early morning hours from Galena, around and over the mountain range to Harrison Junction, the other terminal point of the Round Top road.

As soon as Fred received his orders he climbed into the engine and went to work making her ready.

The road was a bit shy of capable engineers and a new man had been employed the day before.

He was ordered to take 18 out, and in due time appeared at the roundhouse, climbed into the cab without taking particular notice of Fred, and began to put on his overalls and jumper.

Fred noticed that he wore a heavy black beard that concealed three-quarters of his features.

He also heard the foreman address him as Blackwell.

Fred paid very little attention to him, but kept about his work, and had the locomotive ready when Blackwell received his signal to pull out of the train shed.

It was not till they were coupled on and ready to start that the engineer gave his fireman more than a casual glance.

Now as they sat on opposite seats in the cab, Fred's hand in readiness to grasp the bell rope, Blackwell cast a keen glance at the boy.

He gave a visible start as his eyes rested on the lad's clear-cut face, and a muttered imprecation came through his teeth.

For some unexplained reason he did not seem pleased with his companion.

After that he eyed the boy furtively until the signal came to pull out of the yard.

The man was so non-communicative and taciturn that Fred made no effort to enter into any conversation with him.

He pulled the bell rope steadily as the long train of loaded box and flat cars wound their way through the entrance of the yard, and started on their long trip toward the foothills and their destination beyond the mountain range.

At length they struck the open country outside of Prescott, and Blackwell ran the speed up to fifteen miles an hour.

They were five or six miles beyond the town, or about half-way to Berkeley, the scene of Fred's exploit of the day before, when the engineer first addressed his companion.

"What's your name?" he asked shortly.

"Fred Stone."

"Humph! Mine is Joe Blackwell."

Ordinarily Fred would have expressed the pleasure he felt at making the engineer's acquaintance, but something about this man repelled him, and he merely nodded.

"Fired long?" asked Blackwell, after a pause.

"No," replied the boy. "This is my first regular trip."

"First, eh?" snorted the engineer, sardonically. "It may be your last if you don't keep her hot and I lose time on your account."

"I'll see that you get all the steam you want," replied Fred quietly, rather resenting the man's aggressive manner.

"See that you do, or I'll report you to the master mechanic."

Fred made no reply, but after a glance at the gauge he got busy with the shovel and kept it on a steady swing while Blackwell sat on his seat and scowled at him.

For a while everything went all right, and Fred had moments of rest when he had nothing to do but look out of the window at the passing landscape.

Ten miles beyond Berkeley they struck the gentle rise along the foothills, and then a change came over the situation.

Fred noticed with some surprise that he couldn't keep the steam gauge at the required figure.

Though he did his utmost with the shovel the finger on the dial would show a continual tendency to drop off a little.

This was truly a discouraging outlook for his first day on the road.

It was a reflection on his ability to fire properly.

The perspiration rolled off his face as he swung his shovel with more than usual vigor, yet in spite of every effort the dropping finger on the gauge stared back tantalizingly at him.

Suddenly he observed a triumphantly wicked grin on the engineer's bearded countenance.

There was a world of suggestion in that look, and all at once it struck the boy that Blackwell was in some way responsible for his failure to maintain a decent head of steam.

Across his mind flashed many of the stories related to him by Sam Hawley, of the various tricks resorted to by engineers to down a fireman against whom they held a grudge.

"I'll bet this fellow is a pounder," muttered the boy. "Well, he's not going to do me up if I can help it."

"I thought you knew how to fire," laughed Blackwell, wickedly.

"Oh, I can fire all right. I've proved that in the yard," replied Fred.

"In the yard," sneered the engineer. "The trouble with you is you're lazy, see? Why don't you get a move on, then p'raps you'll be able to keep the gauge about right."

This was adding insult to injury, for Fred had been working like a Trojan for the last thirty minutes, and he showed it by his heated and perspiring face.

"It's my opinion you're wasting steam as fast as I make it. You're not cutting off when you should."

"Perhaps you think you could run this engine better?" said Blackwell, sarcastically.

"I know one thing," retorted Fred, who had been using his eyes during the last few minutes, "I wouldn't keep her hooked up to the notch on the quadrant that you have her hitched to."

"Oh, you wouldn't?" grinned the new engineer.

"No, I wouldn't. You're doing that on purpose to make it all the harder for me," replied Fred, with some spirit.

"Who's runnin' this engine? You or me?" said Blackwell, angrily.

"You're trying to," answered Fred, calmly.

"Well, blame your impudence! If I don't do you up before we finish this trip, it won't be for the want of tryin'."

"I'm much obliged to you for your kind intentions, but before you go any further I'd like to know why you've taken a dislike to me from the start? I am not aware that I have done anything to warrant you getting down on me."

"I've got my reasons," replied the man in a surly tone.

"It's very funny, as I never saw you before this mornin'."

"It don't make no manner of difference whether you did or not. I don't like your face, and when I don't like a chap's face I always do him up, see?"

"I see; but I don't think you'll succeed."

"Don't you? Well, we'll see," replied the engineer darkly.

"You can report me if you choose; but I'll have something to say, too."

"What will you have to say? Do you s'pose anythin' you may say will amount to a brass tag?"

"Don't be too confident about that, Mr. Blackwell. You might be tripped up."

"Yah! You make me sick!" snorted the engineer.

He thrust his head out of the window to take a look ahead. Fred was looking straight at him at the time, and a singular thing happened.

The wind lifted one whole side of his black beard from his cheek and showed conclusively that the hair was false.

"What does that mean?" thought the boy, staring fixedly at the disguised engineer.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIGHT IN THE CAB.

"What are you lookin' at?" demanded Blackwell, with a scowl, when he drew in his head, and saw his fireman's eyes fixed in a peculiar manner on his face.

"I was looking at that beard you're wearing," replied Fred, quietly. "It doesn't seem to fit very well."

"What's that?" roared Blackwell, with something almost like an oath.

"I was wondering what reason you have for wearing false whiskers."

"False whiskers, you young fool!" cried the engineer, glaring at him furiously.

Fred did not answer, but resumed the shoveling of coal into the furnace.

Blackwell, after a swift glance ahead, jumped off his seat and grabbing Fred shook his fist in his face.

"You sneaking spy, I've a great mind to toss you into the furnace along with the coal!" he cried hoarsely, his eyes snapping like those of an angry beast.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Fred. "Are you crazy?"

Blackwell's reply was a blow in the face that sent the boy staggering up against the side of the cab.

The engineer seized the shovel that had fallen from Fred's hand and raised it, as though it was his intention to brain the lad before he could recover.

Swift as a wink Fred dodged and then butted the man in the pit of his stomach.

He fell against his seat, and his false beard, becoming dislodged, dropped to the floor of the cab, revealing to the astonished boy the features of Gibson—one of the men who had been concerned in the attempted wrecking of the afternoon express three months before.

The man sprang to his feet with a howl of rage.

Realizing that his identity was exposed, he jumped on Fred and tried to bear him to the floor, but the boy partially eluded his grip and struck him a swift hook in the jaw, which brought blood.

Then the two grappled and staggered around the cab, while the engine went on its way untended, dragging its long line of cars behind, and passing a crossing without the regulation warning of whistle and bell.

There was no small danger that the two would fall through the opening between the cab and the tender, and be dashed to death alongside the road.

Gibson's intention was to try and overcome his young fireman and throw him out of the cab, for now that Fred had identified him the prison yawned before him, unless he could effectually silence the boy.

Fred, however, was a tough proposition for any ordinary man to tackle, and Gibson soon found he was making little headway in the battle for the supremacy.

He changed his tactics then.

Releasing his grip somewhat, and falling back on his seat, he suddenly grabbed a good-sized monkey-wrench that lay on a shelf at his elbow and tried to smash in the boy's head with it.

Fred seized his upraised wrist and prevented the blow from falling.

Thus they stood for a moment facing each other—the fire of determination in the lad's eyes, the glare of hate in Gibson's.

"I'll kill you!" gritted the new engineer malevolently.

"I don't think you will," retorted Fred, with heaving breast.

Then the desperate struggle was renewed, with greater fury on Gibson's part.

It was largely a question of brute strength in that narrow place, with honors in that respect about even.

Neither seemed able to obtain the slightest advantage over the other until Fred stepped on a piece of coal, which slid under his tread, and down he went on the iron floor with Gibson on top.

The wrench flew out of the engineer's hand and reach.

The shock partially stunned the boy, and as his grip on the engineer relaxed, Gibson uttered a howl of triumph, and began pushing the young fireman head first out of the entrance to the cab.

Fred recovered his wits in time to realize what the man was doing and struggle against it.

A desperate life and death fight on his part ensued.

The speed of the train was growing less and less, owing to the steady decrease of steam, and without the furnace was speedily replenished the train ere long was bound to come to a standstill, for it was a heavy one to haul.

The boy tried to squirm out from underneath his adversary, but Gibson had his knee planted firmly on his chest, and was trying to get a good clutch on the lad's throat.

Fred grabbed both his wrists in an effort to defeat his enemy's object.

The man, however, was determined to down the boy, for,

his identity having been penetrated, he knew it was all up with him if the young fireman escaped him.

It meant also the defeat of whatever object he had in seeking employment on Round Top road.

"Drat ye!" he gritted, glowering down upon Fred. "Don't think you are goin' to get away from me. You know who I am, and that knowledge means death to you."

With a sudden move he succeeded in clutching the boy around the throat, and Fred began to gasp for breath.

"Now I've got you where I want you!" exclaimed Gibson, with fiendish satisfaction. "I'll fix you!"

He raised the boy's head and pounded it against the iron flooring of the cab.

Fred was powerless to save himself from the rage of that desperate villain.

His senses left him, and his head dropped back like that of a dead person.

Gibson held him a moment longer to be sure that he was not shamming, then he pushed the young fireman out of the cab.

It happened that the locomotive just at that time was crossing a culvert which spanned a narrow but deep stream.

Fred's body fell with a splash into the water and was borne away.

Gibson sprang to his feet, wiped the perspiration from his face, and gazed wildly from the window for a moment or two.

He was shivering as with the ague, for now that he was beginning to realize that he was guilty of a murder the enormity of the crime began to take hold of him.

"Murder!" he muttered hoarsely. "No, no; it was a fair fight, and I got the best of him, that's all."

His eyes resting on the steam gauge, he saw how low the pressure was, and, throwing open the furnace door, he started to shovel coal in like a wild man.

Then he jumped into his seat and made certain changes in the running of the engine which produced immediate results for the better.

The train began to pull out faster.

Presently he returned to the operation of shoveling more coal into the furnace.

He alternated in this way between his duties as engineer and those of fireman until he made out in the distance the station at which he had instructions to pick up a couple of loaded box cars that were waiting ready on the siding.

He let off the whistle, and then began to consider what reason he could hatch up to explain the absence of his fireman.

He took care, however, to pick up his false beard and restore it to his face.

Coming to a stop alongside the station platform, he jumped down and signaled to the conductor who was advancing from the caboose.

To him he reported that he had lost his young fireman at the culvert three miles back.

"He stepped out on the footboard with the oil can in his hand," said Gibson glibly, "and that's the last I saw of him. I wasn't payin' any attention to his movements at the time. When I saw he was stayin' out there an uncommonly long time, I stepped around to his side of the cab to see what he was about. Then I was astonished to see no signs of him anywhere. I can't account for it unless he lost his balance somehow and tumbled off."

The conductor of course had to accept his statement of the matter, for there was no reason for him to suspect the engineer of not telling the exact truth.

He reported the facts to the station agent for transmission by wire to the master mechanic's office, and then ordered one of the brakemen to fire for Gibson till they reached their destination at Harrison Junction.

CHAPTER XV.

LOST AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

The sudden emersion in cold water brought Fred to his senses.

Without actually realizing what had happened to him, he instinctively struck out for his life.

The stream was a swift mountain one, and the boy was borne rapidly away upon its surface as the train disappeared in the distance.

Suddenly he was plunged into impenetrable darkness.

The course of the stream led right through the mountain range.

Fred was carried along like a chip, and the best he could do was to try and keep his head above the water.

He couldn't tell at what moment he might be dashed against a rock or a stony ledge in the gloom which surrounded him.

Having recovered all his wits, and realized that Gibson had thrown him out of the cab while he was momentarily unconscious, he decided that the only course before him was to let himself float with the stream, hoping that he might soon come out in the light of day again.

The rush of the seething water was now continually in his ears, and he could hear it splashing against the rocky sides of the underground passage.

Had Fred not been an unusually good swimmer, and capable of keeping himself afloat for an indefinite time, even under such disadvantageous circumstances, this trip through the bowels of the mountain range must have speedily ended in his death.

As it was, there were times when he was more than half smothered in the spume that was dashed into his face.

It seemed to him as if hours passed while he was making that terrible underground trip, though in reality less than twenty minutes elapsed from the time he began it until he was vomited far into a deep gorge, where once more he caught the light of day.

Here the stream bounded over rocks and other barriers that converted it into a foaming torrent.

The prospect of being dashed against one of these obstacles nerved Fred to a great effort to reach the bank.

He struck out with all his might and finally succeeded in catching hold of an overhanging dead tree limb.

With the help of this he pulled himself in safety to the bank and waded out.

"Gracious!" he breathed, as he seated himself on a rock to recover his strength. "This has been a fierce morning's adventure. That scoundrel, Gibson, all but laid me out; and the mountain stream nearly completed what he did not finish. That fellow can have no good purpose in getting a job on the Round Top road. I don't believe he had any idea that I was connected with the road until he recognized me as his fireman in the cab. There is some other reason to account for his presence on the road. I'd give something to know what it is. Well, he won't last any longer than I can get a chance to wire the president of the line. He'll see the inside of a jail before he's twenty-four hours older, I'll bet a hat. The next thing is to find out where I am at. Somewhere in the Round Top range, of course. But where? How far from the railway? And in which direction shall I turn in order to find my way back to the line with the least delay possible? That's the important question."

After some consideration Fred decided to follow the gorge in a direction opposite to the course of the stream.

So after resting himself sufficiently he started to make his way through the labyrinth of rocks, brushwood and other obstructions, which made anything like rapid progress through the gorge an impossibility.

It was a wild, lonely and toilsome journey that was before him.

The brown, bush-covered sides of the mountains rose on either hand, their ridges seeming to pierce the very sky far above.

In places he had to climb the obstacles that lay scattered in his path in order to surmount them.

It was slow work penetrating the fastnesses of the Round Top range, in some part of which the railroad company was excavating a tunnel to shorten their line to Harrison Junction.

After spending several hours in this jungle, the sun appeared in the opening above, throwing a flood of yellow light up and down the ravine.

"It must be nearly noon," he said to himself. "It looks as if I had an all-day job before me to get out of this unfrequented region. Perhaps I may consider myself lucky if I'm not lost in these wilds. It will be pretty tough if night overtakes me before I can get out of this maze."

Yes, that would certainly be tough luck, and as hour after hour passed away, and the boy seemed no nearer the end of his monotonous and tiresome journey, it began to look as if his worst fears were about to be realized.

There was nothing for him to do but keep on and trust to luck.

He was not the kind of boy to be discouraged because the outlook appeared black.

He gritted his teeth determinedly and persevered, confi-

dently looking forward to an outlet into the civilized country side.

Darkness came upon him at last when he reached a cavern-like opening in the mountain-side, and he sat down in the gloom and began to consider the seriousness of his situation.

He was footsore and weary, and above all desperately hungry.

While he was ruminating in no very happy frame of mind, he suddenly became conscious of the approach of human voices.

Two men stepped out of the cave and paused close by.

"Well," remarked one of them, in tones that sounded familiar to Fred, "is everything ready?"

"Yes," replied his companion. "I have planted the dynamite where it will do the most good. All that remains is to touch off the fuse—it's a fifteen-minute one—and work on that tunnel will be brought to a stop for many a day to come."

The speaker struck a match to light a pipe he held between his lips, and, as the light flared up, Fred, to his great surprise, recognized the features of Morgan and Mr. Squires.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"Good," remarked Mr. Squires, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "Then you'd better set a match to the fuse at once and we'll dust out of this without further delay."

"All right. That suits me. Just wait a moment till I light this lantern."

Fred drew back into the bushes, fearful that the light might betray his presence.

"So," he thought, "these two rascals have found another way to get back at the Round Top road. They mean to destroy a section of the new tunnel and thus delay that difficult piece of engineering. I wonder if I can't prevent this scheme? It is a pretty serious matter butting single-handed against those two chaps, but I mean to do what I can to save the company loss. I consider that in the line of my duty. There they go back into the cave. I'll just follow them."

Fred forgot all about his tired feet and empty stomach in the excitement of the moment.

Keeping at a respectable distance behind the two men, he followed the lantern light as a guide to their movements.

They proceeded for some distance into the heart of the mountain, and then all at once the light disappeared.

"My gracious! Where have they gone?" the boy asked himself, dismayed at finding himself alone in total darkness.

At the imminent risk of discovery, he ran forward as fast as he could until he butted squarely into the face of what appeared to be a rocky wall.

He hurriedly felt around in front, only to find the solid rock barring his way.

"There must be an opening somewhere," he said, anxiously, "else how could those chaps have vanished right before my eyes?"

He remembered he had some matches in his pocket.

He struck one, and as it flared up he saw a narrow slit in the back wall of the cavern.

"That's where they passed through," he cried eagerly, making for it.

It took him but a moment to worm his way through the narrow break, and then he found himself in the tunnel that the railroad company was excavating through Round Top mountain.

He sank quickly down on his hands and knees, for scarcely a dozen feet away stood Mr. Squires and Morgan with the lantern on the ground between them.

As he watched them he saw Morgan bend down, open the lantern slide, take out the bit of candle, and hold it down near the ground.

Presently there was a slight flash, and something began to sputter in the dark, throwing out myriads of tiny sparks.

"That's the fuse," palpitated Fred, watching the bright spot with a fascinated gaze. "It connects with the dynamite somewhere in the depths of the tunnel. There'll be a terrible explosion presently unless something can be done to prevent it."

As Fred whispered those words to himself Morgan picked up the lantern and replaced the candle in it.

Then the two men hurried away toward the mouth of the tunnel.

Fred hardly waited for them to get a safe distance away

before he made a dash for the spark that glowed and crawled away into the gloom.

Reaching it, he put his heel down on it hard and ground the life out of it.

When it lay black and harmless on the ground at his feet, he breathed a sigh of satisfaction and relief.

"Now to make my way out of this. As I am now in the tunnel, that ought to be plain sailing in spite of the darkness."

He was right in his surmise.

He had no difficulty in following the course of the tunnel, and in ten minutes was in the open air with the lights of the workmen's shanties shining before his eyes.

He made his way to the office of the assistant superintendent of construction, who had charge of the work, and told him about the attempt which had just been made, and which he had frustrated, to destroy the work of construction in the tunnel.

Fred also explained who he was and how he had come to be in that locality.

Food was soon placed before him, which he devoured with the zest of a starving boy, and when he had satisfied his appetite he led the official and his assistant direct to the spot where the now harmless fuse lay.

An investigation disclosed the charges of dynamite so disposed in crevices of the rock that their combined explosion must have wrought the greatest havoc in the tunnel, and not only have delayed the work a long time, but have caused the company a large pecuniary loss.

The assistant superintendent of construction telegraphed the particulars to the offices of the company at Galena, and asked that a couple of detectives be sent out at once.

At Fred's suggestion he also telegraphed to Harrison Junction an order for the arrest of the disguised Gibson, masquerading under the name of Engineer Blackwell.

The boy then started to walk to the nearest station, three miles away, where a passenger local would stop at ten o'clock.

A mile away he struck the country road just as a wagon, driven by a weather-beaten man, came along.

"I say," said Fred, "do you mind giving me a lift as far as the cross-roads?"

"Jump up, my hearty," said the voice of Jack Barnstable, and Fred jumped up accordingly.

"I see you're a traveling tinker," said the boy, observing the nature of the material in the body of the wagon.

"I was, my lad, but I've given it up for good."

"It didn't pay, eh?"

"It isn't that. I only followed the business, you see, to pay my expenses while I was huntin' for my dear old cap'n's son."

"You don't say. Was he lost?"

"Yes. Lost for good, I'm afeard. At any rate the time is about up in which he could prove his right to a big fortune. Now the money'll go to somebody else, more is the pity. Well, I done my best to find him, and it ain't my fault that he won't come into his own."

"What's his name?" asked Fred, curiously.

"His name," replied Barnstable solemnly, "is Fred Stone."

"Fred Stone!" ejaculated our hero in surprise. "Why, that's my name."

"Yours!" almost shouted the sailor, reining in his horse.

"Did you say your name is Fred Stone?"

"I did."

"Where do you live?"

"I'm living now at Prescott; that is, since I went to work for the railroad company, but until three months ago I always lived in Dover village."

"Dover village?"

"Yes. With Mr. Peter Grice, the postmaster."

"What! You've been living with Peter Grice?"

"I have, ever since he took charge of me when my mother died twelve years ago."

"Why, I was in Dover three months ago, and stopped at Peter Grice's store. He said he never heard of such a boy as Fred Stone."

"That's very funny," replied Fred.

Jack Barnstable lit a match and held it before Fred's face.

"Why, you're the very picture of my dear old cap'n. Hurrah! Found at last!"

Explanations that followed demonstrated the fact to both of them that Peter Grice was a rascal at heart, and was conspiring to do his half-brother's son out of his fortune.

Fred also learned that his real name was Sands and not Stone.

The boy didn't take the train for Prescott that night, but rode back all the way to Dover in Barnstable's wagon.

They arrived about midnight, and put up at the village inn.

Next morning they presented themselves at the store, to the great surprise and confusion of the postmaster, who, when taxed with his treachery, threw up his hands and confessed his guilt.

Fred hastened to get leave of absence from the railroad company so that he could go to New York and claim his father's bonds.

He had no difficulty whatever in getting it, and accompanied the sailor to New York, where he proved his identity, and the Trust Company was appointed his guardian in law.

He insisted that Jack Barnstable should receive the sum of \$10,000, as a recognition of his loyalty and trouble in hunting for and finally finding his "dear old cap'n's son."

When Fred returned to Prescott he found that Mr. Squires, Gibson and Morgan had been captured and were in the Galena jail.

They were subsequently tried, and, on Fred's evidence, sent to the State prison for a long term.

Fred himself was highly complimented for saving the tunnel from destruction, and was presented by the company with another \$5,000 check in recognition thereof.

The fact that he had earned \$11,000 by his pluck, and was heir to \$90,000 more, which would come to him when he reached his majority, did not give him a swelled head at all.

He continued to be the same old Fred.

He continued for a year as fireman on a freight, and was then promoted to a passenger train.

Six months later he reached the goal of his ambition, that of engineer.

On his twenty-first birthday he married Kittie Clyde, and presented her with the deed to the fine home they were to occupy in Prescott.

Fred, however, did not stop at engineer.

The company could not afford to keep such a bright young man even in charge of their mountain express long.

He was made superintendent of the Round Top Division, and proved himself fully capable of discharging the duties of that responsible position.

But to-day he is still higher, for he is general manager of the road, but is not too proud to acknowledge that as common wiper he received his Start in Life.

Next week's issue will contain "OUT FOR A MILLION; OR, THE YOUNG MIDAS OF WALL STREET."

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE.

CURRENT NEWS

Mrs. Alfred VanDusen, of Greenville, Pa., probably owes her life to a chew of tobacco. Mrs. VanDusen took bichloride of mercury tablets in mistake for headache medicine. Discovering the mistake, she told her husband, who persuaded her to put a quid of tobacco in her mouth and swallow the juice, which acted as an emetic and assisted the medicine of a physician who was called.

There is a heavy run of salmon in the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, Washington, and in the latter stream, on which the State fish hatchery is located, the run is the greatest ever known to white men. This stream is protected by law on account of the hatchery, and fishermen are forbidden to operate in it with their gear, and many of the riffles are so crowded with fish that one can hardly cross the stream without stepping on them.

Moab Turner, seventy-seven, died recently of paralysis at his home, Newcastle, Ind. He was an eccentric character. Thirty years ago, when he suffered the first stroke of paralysis, he made his funeral plans, which were carried out as nearly as possible. At that time he had a coffin built from a great solid walnut chest, which had been in the family for years. The coffin had been in the care of a local undertaker for the last ten years.

A farm in the Ozark section of Missouri, which Emil Hoffman, of Junction City, Kan., purchased against the advice of his friends, is proving to be a good investment. Several years ago Mr. Hoffman purchased the land and went to live on it. He not only made a good living off of the land, but discovered a deposit of coal on it, and now gets a royalty on each ton that is taken from the new mine on the place. Mr. Hoffman has leased the remainder of his farm and has returned to Junction City for a long visit.

Barney Shields, a local merchant of Lewiston, Pa., had the secret service working overtime for twenty-four hours seeking a second-story worker who he thought relieved his trousers pockets as they dangled from the bedpost in his room. Shields suddenly recalled a dream of the previous night, in which burglars played an important part, and visiting the cache portrayed in his dream found his roll intact. Shields says he must have changed the hiding-place of the money while in a somnambulistic state.

Miss Gretchen Detchemendy, twenty, of Carthage, Mo., has sold for \$15,000 a one-fourth interest in a zinc mine which she received from J. A. Langston, seventy-five, a wealthy resident of Springfield, Mo., because she was kind to him and entertained him while at a summer resort last year in Colorado. Miss Detchemendy and Langston became fast friends during their stay in Colorado, and when she returned home he sent her a deed for the interest in the mine near Commerce, Okla. She began receiving dividends on her interest in the mine last March and was

getting \$100 a week when she sold, because "you never can tell," she says, "when the price of zinc is going down or the ore deposit is going to go 'blind.'"

Major-Gen. Hiraoka, who has just come back to Japan from the island of Formosa, declares that the late revolt had a curious origin. It appears that a rumor gained circulation among the aborigines that in the mountains had appeared a sage so holy that his ears hung down to his shoulders and so wise that he was even better fitted to be the ruler over the aborigines than Baron Goto. A local prophet assured the natives that this mysterious personage was the heaven ordained Emperor of Formosa, and that if they did not rise at once to do battle for his cause they would regret it all their lives. They rose, fully expecting that Big Ears would come to their assistance, but were disappointed.

Mrs. R. H. Ashbaugh, president of the Michigan Federation of Women's Clubs, objects utterly to an exhibition of bathing suits of the mode for 1916 at the fashion fete, which the Union League has announced it will give at the Hotel Pontchartrain, Detroit. There, the loveliest debutantes of the season, daughters of Detroit's first families, will pose in the newest creations of some of the girls in bathing suits, it is proposed. "I shall see the mothers of some of these girls and try to persuade them not to permit their daughters to appear in bathing suits at the fete," is the emphatic remark attributed to Mrs. Ashbaugh, sister of John F. and Horace E. Dodge, millionaire motor manufacturers. "I hope, after a certain action I have in mind is taken, the young ladies of the Junior League will reserve their bathing suits for the beaches."

The Skidmore mansion, a ten-room framehouse, two stories and attic, was moved at high tide from its location on Awixa avenue, Bay Shore, L. I., to a new site on Maple avenue. The move was by way of Great South Bay, huge lumber scows being used for the floats. The distance was about one mile. The house was taken off the scows and set on its new foundation at high tide. The Skidmore mansion was recently purchased from J. Adolph Mollenhauer by a syndicate of local capitalists whose object was to move it across Great South Bay to little Fire Island, where it was to be used as a home for a fishing and gunning club that is being organized. The change of plan was due to the great risk in moving so large a house such a distance by water. The wind pressure, it was thought, would cause it to capsize. The mansion was built and for years occupied by William Skidmore, and later by his widow, Mrs. Marie Skidmore. A year or two ago it was sold to Percy H. Taylor, who was acting for J. Adolph Mollenhauer. Mr. Mollenhauer wanted to purchase, but the price was set too high for him, so Mr. Taylor made the deal and immediately turned the property over to Mr. Mollenhauer, who will add the two acres to his handsome country-place at Bay Shore.